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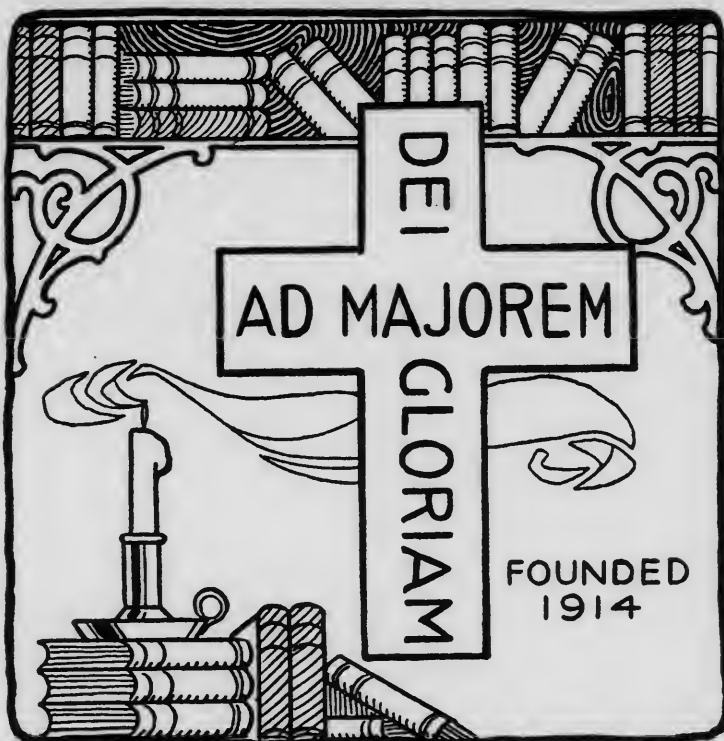


BLACK  
COUNTRY  
METHODISM

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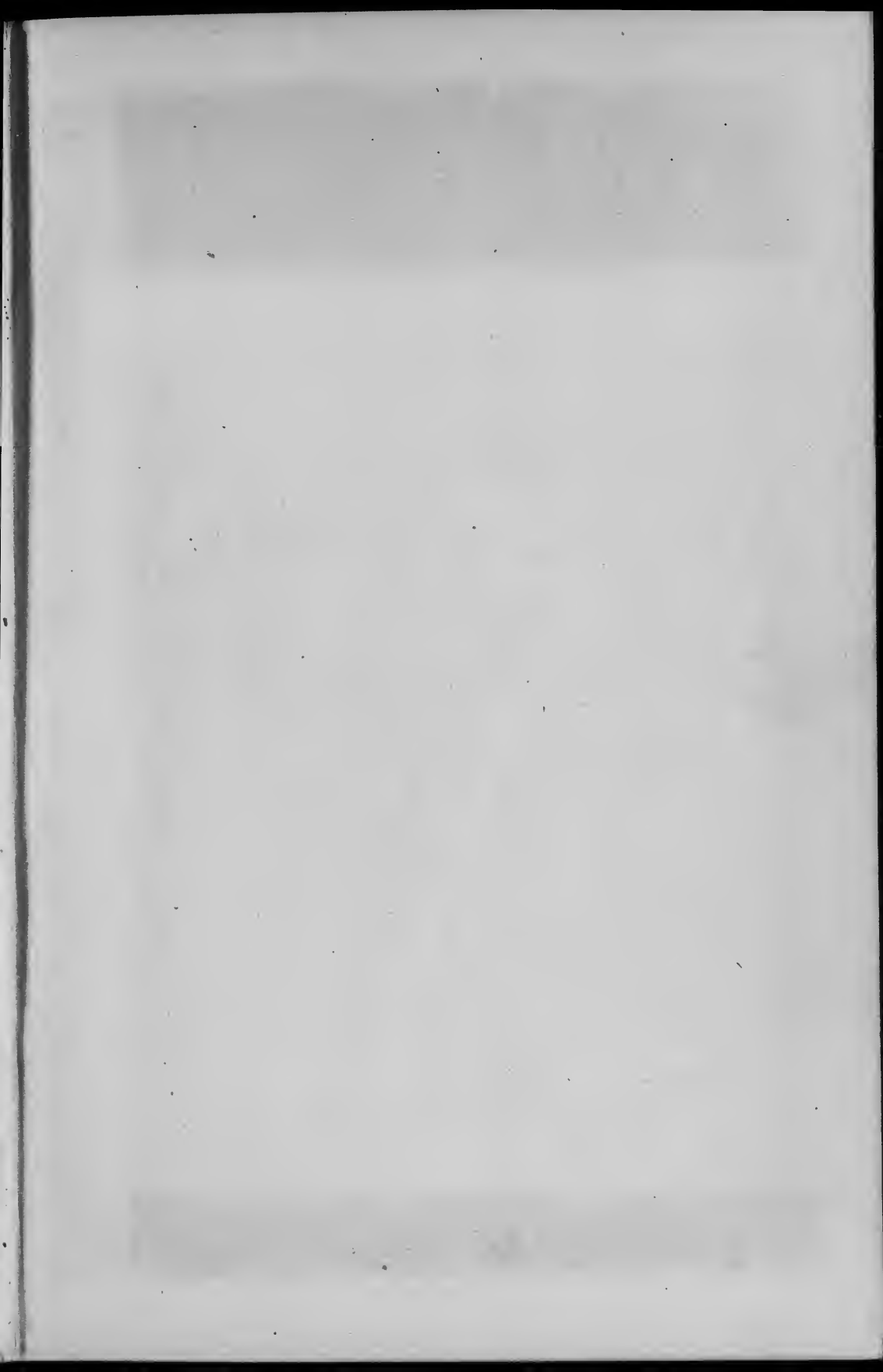


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BLACK COUNTRY METHODISM.



THE TRAVELLING PREACHER AND JOHN SMITH THE LOCKSMITH.—P. 12.

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# BLACK COUNTRY METHODISM.

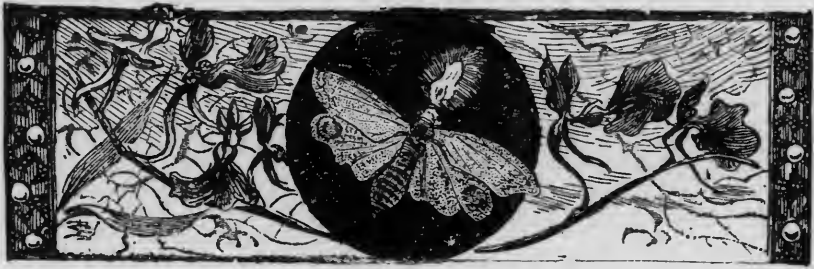
BY  
ALFRED CAMDEN PRATT.



LONDON:  
CHARLES H. KELLY, 2, CASTLE STREET, CITY ROAD, E.C.;  
AND 66, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.,  
1891.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

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IT had been the intention of the late Mr. Alfred Camden Pratt to revise and arrange for re-publication in book form selections from the extensive series of articles he wrote during the years 1883 and 1884, under the title of "BITS OF THE OLD BLACK COUNTRY." Pressure of journalistic and other labours compelled him, however, to put off this work from time to time. A visit to the Exhibitions at Antwerp and Buda-Pesth in 1885, together with the writing of a number of reports in connection therewith, helped to keep him occupied until the autumn, when he began to look forward to having the wished-for opportunity for revising his "Bits." But in August indications of ill health presented themselves. He proceeded to Droitwich Baths for a short time, but gained no apparent benefit, and returned to his home at Wolverhampton, to die there on the morning of the 5th of September, only a few hours after symptoms of a grave nature had appeared.

In these circumstances the present volume has not had the advantage of revision by the author, and little has been attempted beyond selecting from the articles those which

appeared to give such an account of the rise and development of the Methodist movement in the Black Country as would be likely to engage the attention of a wider circle of readers than the residents of the district more especially concerned. Many of the incidents connected with John Wesley's visits to the Black Country will be already familiar to those who are acquainted with his "Journals;" but these incidents will be read with the keener interest in the light of Mr. Pratt's sketches, both of the life led by the people among whom the events described occurred, and of the habits and characteristics—often quaint enough, as the reader will find—of those who took up and carried on the work inaugurated amid such stirring scenes by John Wesley. As a means, too, of giving a true picture of these bygone times, Mr. Pratt's sketches should prove a valuable appendage to the barer records of history, for they bring the people themselves far more vividly before us than any dry narration of leading events could do. His qualification for offering such an appendage cannot be doubted. "Nations," says Alphonse Esquiros, "are like women; to know them you must love them." In this sense Mr. Pratt "knew" perfectly well the people of whom he has treated. His acquaintance with the Black Country extended over a period of more than thirty years. As a journalist, as a temperance advocate, and as the manager of a now flourishing benefit society—(of which, out of sympathy with a large number of Black Country working men, he undertook the direction when, in 1855, it was on the point of coming to a total collapse,)—in these capacities he had abundant opportunity to study Black Country people, and to discover and admire excellent qualities underlying a rough exterior; but it was more especially his own active connection with

Methodist bodies for a considerable period, at one time of his life, that brought him as a "local preacher" into direct contact with old members and veterans in the work, retired from active service, from whose recollections, or from whose experiences, added to his own, he derived his account of many of the events described in the following pages. Yet, however greatly he esteemed the excellent qualities of the people and the forefathers of the people among whom he spent the best years of his life, he was strictly impartial in the pictures he drew of them, never overlooking their peculiarities and shortcomings, and never omitting what might be regarded by descendants as unpleasant facts, when they would afford a clearer view of the times under consideration. The result is what, it is to be hoped, will be regarded as a valuable contribution to the history of one of the greatest social revolutions in this country in modern times.

With the view of giving a consecutive account of the Wolverhampton Methodists down to the time of the erection of Trinity Chapel, all the articles dealing with that Circuit have been brought together in the First Part. Those relating to Darlaston, Willenhall, Bilston, etc., have been placed in a Second Part, although it will be seen that, chronologically, some of the latter allude to the same series of events as those narrated by the former.

It should also be pointed out that when the words "still," "now," or "at present" are used, or implied, they must be understood as referring to a period not later than the autumn of 1884.

E. A. P.







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# BLACK COUNTRY METHODISM.

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## *PART I.*

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### CHAPTER I.

#### BEFORE NOAH'S ARK.

WHEN the Rev. Mr. Holland was the minister stationed in the Wolverhampton Circuit of Wesleyan Methodists, he recounted, at a meeting held in Darlington Street Chapel in that town, the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of Wesleyanism in the Circuit, and had barely finished his glowing account when an ancient dame confounded the orator and threw the audience into a convulsion of laughter by raising her hands and her eyes, and, in tones of astounded thankfulness, exclaiming, "And to think it has all come out of Noah's Ark! The Lord be praised! Hallelujah!" The "Noah's Ark" she alluded to was not that of Noah, nor the ancient hostelry of that name which fronted old Lichfield Street in Wolverhampton, but a little chapel erected at the back of that inn, and which for the first quarter of this century contained all that Wolverhampton could once

boast of Wesleyan Methodism. Taking its name from the public-house behind which it hid its light, it was known as "Noah's Ark Chapel." The old lady was right. Big as Methodism is now in Wolverhampton and its immediate neighbourhood, it came out of "the Ark." But then, like the strange animals and queer fishes which were once in Noah's Ark, it had to be got in before it could be got out ; and it will be found ere I have done with its local history that that history divides itself, very much like a sermon, and also like history in relation to old Noah's Ark itself, into three heads—Before the Ark, In the Ark, and After the Ark ; and as the third head is still going ahead, the reader will be cheered by the fact that any "application" on my part would be untimely and out of place.

But to my discourse—Firstly, Before the Ark. Well, I am afraid that the aspect of Wolverhampton before the time of *its* Ark was so far like that of the world before *the* Ark that at last rested on Mount Ararat, that the number of those who were pious and abstemious was very few compared with the number of those whose principal god was the spirit of fleshly appetite. I confine myself to the latter half of the last century, when John Wesley was frequently in the Black Country, warning the people, like Noah of old, to "flee from the wrath to come." All he sought from them was an expression of anxiety to flee from that "wrath to come," and it is a fact to this day that all that is required from any applicant for membership with the Wesleyan body is the expression of an anxiety to flee from the wrath to come, and the leading of a life in conformity with the expression of faith in such wrath. John Wesley was perhaps the first man of that age to preach coming "wrath" with a fervour that betokened faith in the doctrine. Too many of the clergy preached it so coldly and lived so pleasurably as to carry conviction that they themselves foresaw no such wrath, and that the contemplation of the future need not interfere with the enjoyment of the present. In Wolverhampton fifty years

ago the town could boast of only three churches and several chapels. What must it have been about seventy years previously, when there was but one church and one chapel? Then, too, the few magistrates and constables of those days were as sleepy as the few parsons, ordained and unordained; and, provided a man was ignorant enough, and poor enough, and stupid enough not to trouble them, they would not trouble their heads about him. Ignoramuses were almost as plentiful as heads then, poverty was more abundant than ever it has been since, and nobody was wise enough in those days to dam out inflowing stupidity with a blue ribbon. The majority were left to get on as best they could, the minority taking care only that they did not get on too well. Do you wonder then that when those above them who counted themselves, and were accounted by all others, "great," were thus contented and at rest with the masses, the said masses should count it an impertinent and offensive intrusion when one man came and threatened them with "wrath to come" for being what Church and State had made them, and for being what those great "bulwarks of England's greatness" were quite content they should be? If within our own times there has been some truth in *Punch's* portraiture of manners in some parts of the district—"A stranger, 'eave 'arf a brick at him!"—what must have been the state of things in "the old Black Country" more than one hundred and twenty years ago, when a stranger came with such a cry and such condemnation in his mouth; and can we wonder that an urchin, ignorant of shoes and stockings, and whose other garments mainly consisted of a greasy pair of leather breeches, should heave a stone at him when he gave plain utterance to his uncomplimentary and unsoothing convictions? Such a stranger to Wolverhampton was John Wesley when he stood on the steps leading to the old-fashioned door of a shop in what is now known as Queen Square, Wolverhampton, and told the surging crowd before him what he thought of them. There, hearing what

he said in that behalf, and nerved to the act by the attitude and cries of his elders, young Mosely threw a stone at the preacher with such aim that blood trickled down the preacher's face. Young Mosely, seeing this, waited for no more Methodism, but took refuge in flight.

According, however, to his firm belief, professed at many a Methodist lovefeast in after years, Methodism followed the young stone-thrower, at first in wrath and then in mercy. It was some time after, while drinking with some shopmates at the "Four Ashes," in Stafford Street, and dropping his head to avoid a frolicsome blow, that he dashed his right eye against the corner of the screen, and destroyed it and its sight for evermore. This came upon him, he thought, as a judgment for having stoned John Wesley. He reflected on the warning, became a good Wesleyan, and died as such, upwards of ninety years of age, at Wolverhampton, some eight-and-twenty years ago.

Such, according to those alive who heard it, was his "experience," as given by himself at many a lovefeast. True, the published extracts from the Journals of Mr. Wesley, in which there are references to many visits he paid to Wolverhampton, make no mention of his having suffered any violence there; and though, as a rule, the records of his going here, there, and everywhere, up and down the country, during his long and itinerant life, are necessarily little more than records of names and dates, yet he was so rarely assaulted, however often he might be threatened, that if it were a fact that he was so struck by a stone at Wolverhampton as to draw blood, however slightly, the incident could hardly have escaped observation in his well-kept Journals. Other unwritten testimony, however, makes it pretty clear that Mr. Wesley did address a tumultuous crowd from the shop steps in question on the erewhile High Green of Wolverhampton, and that on another occasion he preached in the yard of the old Swan Inn, which occupied the site of the present Midland Bank in Dudley Street.

The latter must have been the first occasion on which either he or any Methodist minister preached in the open air in the town, for he records under date March 17th, 1761:—  
“On returning from Shrewsbury I came to Wolverhampton. None had yet preached abroad in this furious town; but I was resolved, with God’s help, to make such a trial, and ordered a table to be set in the inn yard. Such a number of wild men I have seldom seen; but they gave me no disturbance, either while I preached, or when I afterwards walked through the midst of them.” His Journal tells of a visit he paid the previous year to the town. He had been to Dudley, where the “wild men” seemed to have been tamed, for under date Saturday, March 8th, 1760, he expresses his surprise on coming to Wolverhampton, “which is what Dudley was,” at finding “the people so still. Many gaped and stared” about, but neither whilst he was preaching nor afterwards “did any one offer the least rudeness whatever,” and he was allowed to ride quietly out of the town. On this occasion the preaching of Mr. Wesley was not “abroad,” but must have been at the house of some one of his few followers in the town; and the surprise he expresses at being permitted to enter and leave the town unmolested tells of the violence of the times, and the sorry life his followers led at first in Wolverhampton. That troublesome period formed at least the first decade of their denominational existence, for the next entry in Mr. Wesley’s Journals is under date March 23rd, 1768, recording that “After preaching at several places I rode on to Wolverhampton. Here all was quiet, only those who could not get into the house made a little noise for a time; and some hundreds attended me to my lodgings, but it was with no other intent than to stare.” Upon the occasion of his next visit, March 21st, 1770, he found that “Many here were wild and stupid enough; however the greater part were deeply attentive.” This probably refers to some general out-door audience, though doubtless many of the new converts of those days

might be somewhat "wild," and some "stupid enough." That they improved with time is shown by the negative evidence that with regard to his next recorded visit to the town Mr. Wesley is content simply to state the fact that he preached at Wolverhampton, Monday, July 14th, 1773. He was there again in the spring of the following year, for <sup>h</sup>e says, under date Monday, March 21st, 1774: "I preached at nine in Darlaston, and about noon at Wolverhampton. Here I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Fletcher, and we took sweet counsel together. Tuesday, 22nd: At five I explained that important truth, that God is with us every moment, weighs all our thoughts, words, and actions, and is pleased or displeased with us according to our work. I see more and more clearly that there is a great gulf fixed between us and all those who, by denying this, sap the very foundation both of inward and outward holiness. At ten I preached at Dudley, and in the afternoon spent some time in viewing Mr. Bolton's works, wonderfully ingenious, but the greater part of them wonderfully useless." Next morning he was preaching at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and when one remembers what travelling was in those days, one can but marvel at the man who thus began preaching at five o'clock in the morning, pursued his studies on horseback as he toiled along almost impassable roads, and yet found time to compile more books, as well as to preach more sermons, than any other man of his day.

By 1776 Wesleyanism was everywhere gathering strength and numbers, and Mr. Wesley records that on Friday, April 29th of that year, he "preached to a very large congregation even at Wolverhampton." He was there again on March 23rd, 1779. He was at Birmingham, Dudley, and Wednesbury in the same month of 1781, but in his note of the fact he does not mention Wolverhampton, saying that on Monday, March 26th, "I preached at noon in Mr. Barker's large parlour, at Penkridge. Many stood in the next room, and many in the garden, near the windows,



and I believe all could hear. I brought strange things to the ears of those who had been used to softer doctrines : and I believe not in vain. They seemed to receive the truth in the love thereof." He was in more refined society than that of his followers in Wolverhampton when he was again in its neighbourhood on May 25th, 1783, "In the afternoon of which day I reached Hilton Park, about six miles north of Wolverhampton. Here I found my old acquaintance Miss Freeman, whom I had known almost from a child, with Sir Philip Gibbes's lady and his two amiable daughters in a lonely recess. With these I spent this evening and the next day, both profitably and agreeably." On Monday, March 28th, 1785, he again paid this "amiable family" a visit, but not until after he had preached at Wolverhampton in the morning. Two years after, under date March 28th, 1787, he writes : "In the evening I opened the new house at Wolverhampton, nearly as large as that at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It would not near contain the people, though they were wedged together as close as possible. I believe such a congregation was never seen in Wolverhampton before ; not only so serious, but so well behaved. I hope this is a token for good." He found it was so, for, writing on March 27th in the following year, he records : "About noon I preached at Dudley, and with much liberty of spirit, but with far more at Wolverhampton in the evening, the new house being sufficiently crowded. What a den of lions was this town for many years ! But now, it seems, the last will be first." His last record of Wolverhampton is dated Tuesday, March 23rd, 1790, and is as follows : "About one I preached in the new house at Dudley, one of the neatest in England. It was a profitable season, when two persons, they informed me, found peace with God. We had a pleasant ride to Wolverhampton."



## CHAPTER II.

### PREPARING FOR "THE ARK."

WHATEVER there may be of fault or exaggeration in the tale told by, or of, old Mosely the Locksmith, he was a typical convert to Methodism in its younger days in "the Old Black Country"—one of the "wild men," at whom, as we have seen, John Wesley wrote himself down so astonished. Yet, though wild enough then, the handicraftsmen of Wolverhampton were, thanks to some training in more or less skilled workmanship, intellectually superior to colliers and labourers in the ironworks. In morals and in matters spiritual they could boast no such superiority. It is believed old Mosely himself had, as a boy, started on the road of life and Wolverhampton from a workhouse, slaving from early morn till late at night at heavy stock-lock making for the coarsest of food, the barest of raiment, and plenteous physical suffering for not, as a boy, doing twice as much as any man would do now. Such boys grew up to be men, but only then to toil like brutes, and squander what toil brought in the public-house and the cock-pit, varied by pugilistic encounters among themselves and holiday diversions with bulls and bears. Methodism came and lifted these men up, as no other 'ism of that day could. True, it first knocked them down. It told them very plainly that they were not men, but devils, rushing headlong to

eternal torment. This was black enough, and ugly and provocative enough, and their first impulse was to knock the man down who gave them such a character, and they often did it. But there was a silver lining to this black cloud of "the wrath to come." Lo, in the twinkling of an eye, by faith, they might be changed from devils of darkness to angels of light—from slaves to freemen. By faith all things were to be made profitable to them, as well in this life as in the life to come. Coupled with the "present salvation" to eternal life was intellectual, moral, social, and material gain in this world.

Methodism was, in fact, the great bloodless, religious, and social revolution of England of the eighteenth century which saved the country from such a bloody revolution as that which deluged France before that century closed. The pious Wesleyans in England, as the impious Atheists did afterwards in France, discoursed to the mob in street and market-place on equality and fraternity, and besought them to rise and be free. Both alike told the multitude they were miserable, down-trodden, mean, enslaved, yet—could, if they would, be "great, glorious, and free." The simple difference between the Christian and the political democrat was the method each taught for the recovery of that which was lost. While the one preached, "Lay hold on heavenly grace, be better yourselves, and the world will be better," the other said, "Lay hold on sword and gun, mount the barricades, make the world better, and then you will be better." Seeing that for all human life purposes "the world" is made up of those who live in it, there was more sound logic and plain common sense in the Methodist doctrine of Wesley's days than in that of the afterwards boasted "Age of Reason."

Though they had no bands and banners, the Wesleyans of a hundred years ago were as demonstrative, as self-asserting, as ignorant, and as despised and rejected as the Salvationists of these days, and their teaching and practice

were as unwelcome to the middle and upper classes around them as are the teaching and practice of "the Army;" but then, as now, the equality and fraternity doctrine and practice led the very lowest into a higher life by the very fact of placing them in a position there. Hundreds and thousands fell, but hundreds and thousands, awakened to new life and energy by the very fact of the recognition of their right to hold it by a higher law than any men and manners could make, kept their place. They who have gone beneath the surface of the character of the rougher classes know that with the larger proportion of them this would be the natural result of such a recognition of worth and merit in them even in these days of "government by and for the people;" how much more then must it not have been the case in days when votes that were given to pig-styes were denied to the people; when the heads of the million were as destitute of knowledge as their other extremities were of shoe leather, and religion was made up of lean learning and fat livings? But the position was vastly strengthened by the conviction that this natural result was based on a supernatural foundation; that this call to a higher life was a Divine call; and that it was directly and personally with God they had to deal; and that He personally and directly dealt with each one of them. What would they care for cathedrals and churches who were convinced that they themselves were "temples of the Holy Ghost"? Mr. Wesley might exhort them to go to church, but they preferred his example to his precept, and loved better to sing and pray and have lovefeasts with the converted in back kitchens than to join in the services of the unconverted in the parish church—prayers which, in their exalted views, but mocked the Creator to Whom they were offered.

For long years the early Wesleyans thus worshipped in private houses, and it was in such houses that Mr. Wesley preached to them on the occasion of the greater number of the visits he paid to Wolverhampton. They had only got

another step towards a chapel, and were nine years from "Noah's Ark," when, "in the evening" of Wednesday, March 28th, 1787, he, as recorded in his Journal, "opened the new house at Wolverhampton." By the use of the term "new house" it is evident that before this the Wesleyans of the town had so far combined their forces as to have some fixed house or room in which they met for public worship; but where it was situate there is no legend or record to show. There is little doubt that "the new house" which Mr. Wesley opened was the large meeting-room in what is now known as Canal Street, from which the Wesleyans progressed when they took possession of Noah's Ark Chapel. It was situated on the right-hand side of then Rotton Row, on the town side of the Dog and Partridge; and, as evidence of the darkness amid which the Wesleyan light burned there, this meeting place, for long years after they left it, served as a stable for the bull which was annually baited at the bottom of Rotton Row on the anniversary of Tettenhall Wake. That the wake bull was baited there, and not at Tettenhall, was accounted for by the alleged historic fact that the Wolverhampton roughs, on the occasion of one Tettenhall Wake, stole the bull from Tettenhall, and held that portion of the sports ever after at Wolverhampton. Whether the stolen bull lived until such brutalities came to an end, or why the Tettenhallites did not get another bull, does not appear. That the cruel sport lasted so long in Rotton Row after the Wesleyans had left it, and that, comparatively small as was the room in which they met there, Mr. Wesley found in it "such a congregation as was never seen in Wolverhampton before," are facts which point to a very rotten state of religion and morals in Wolverhampton generally, and in Rotton Row in particular, a hundred years and more ago.

It will have been seen by my extracts from his Journal that Mr. Wesley visited Wolverhampton or the neighbourhood about the spring of every year. In addition, the little

society would receive periodical visits from the itinerant preacher attached to the circuit. Wesleyan circuits in those days were very large, and their ministers were so truly itinerant that they had to be provided with a horse to enable them to make their round of preaching and class-examining visits of the several societies included in each circuit. "The travelling preacher" of the circuit in which Wolverhampton was situate always stayed when coming from its northern extreme at Coven, where the first Methodist of any note was one John Smith, a locksmith. His home at first was an exceedingly humble one—a bit of a workshop, one sitting and one sleeping-room, and a small garden. When the travelling preacher came, his horse was provided with stabling in the village, and its rider occupied the only bed and bedroom in the house, the pious and hospitable host and hostess disposing themselves for the night in the best way they could in the common sitting-room. Smith felt more the straits of the minister than his own, and he and his wife resolved to see what hard work and thrift and the blessing of God would do to extend the "accommodation for man and beast," and make it "good." The work and the thrift were blessed, and Smith enlarged his borders, and they went on enlarging until, two generations afterwards, travelling preachers, long after they ceased to travel much, found no better or heartier entertainment than with the Smiths of Coven.

It would have argued but scant faith indeed in Smith of old, if he had not ascribed his larger ground and increased bedrooms to supernatural agency, for his neighbours did so; and, observing how his prosperity increased with the ministerial visits, and coming to the conclusion that the preacher brought fortune with him in the substantial bags his horse had to carry as well as the rider, many followed Smith's example. Seeing that the saddle-bags contained much of the raw material of the improving discourses which Smith practically carried out to his own improvement,

village wisdom was not so much at fault as village wisdom is sometimes apt to be.

There were many other Smiths, who did and did not meddle with cold iron, who worked out of poverty and obscurity into comparative abundance, worldly ease, and social distinction by hammering out Gospel truth on the anvil of duty ; and their neighbours, taking note of their advance, found conscience stirred by interest, and followed their example, and thus Wesleyanism became fruitful to the building of trade and commerce and good citizenship as well as of "the Ark."

Till that "Ark" was fairly afloat there was no resident minister, and the gaps between the visits of Mr. Wesley and the truly travelling preacher were filled up by the "local preacher," an outcome of the great theological "equality and fraternity" doctrines and practices of John Wesley. Providing the man was full of the Holy Ghost, it mattered little whether he was learned ; and John Wesley would have been the first to admit that his great movement had verified the prophecy of John Wycliff and brought about the time when a poor ploughman should read and understand the New Testament better than many a learned prelate of the Wycliff age. History does not tell whether any ploughman was employed in preparing for "the Ark" in Wolverhampton ; but several old Methodists of the town can tell me of a locksmith who so laboured. His name was Riley, and he was a small master in his trade, who resided in one of the many houses to be found in the upper part of Brickkiln Street, telling how pleasant must have been the small workshops attached to roomy little houses, when both alike were refreshed with pure air and green fields. When Riley was young and strong, and the circuit took in Shrewsbury, he would leave his smith's shop on the Saturday evening, walk to Shrewsbury to preach three sermons on the Sunday, and, the third service ended, would walk back again and be at work on Monday morning. What physical strength, and

animal as well as moral courage, was needed in a man to undertake and execute such a task in the days of bad roads, infested with footpads and highwaymen ! Once he was way-laid and roughly handled, but being a tall, wiry man, and, before his conversion, skilled in pugilistic and wrestling encounters, he quickly beat his assailants off and returned safely home.

Of such stuff were the local preachers, leaders, and others made, who a century and more ago prepared Wolverhampton for its Wesleyan ark.





### CHAPTER III.

#### ENTERING THE ARK.

THE Noah's Ark was a famous old inn in the old times, depending for its custom more upon what it had in than what it showed outside. As it looked at last it showed a great gateway without a gate, and a flat-faced shop-like window, with small features of paned glass of an antique green, lit up with a roseate hue on a winter's evening by the glorious fire which glowed monstrosly in one of the huge open fireplaces of those days. Here on market days substantial farmers and graziers consorted with fat butchers and keen dealers in thrashed grain, drove hard bargains, ate huge joints at dinner, and drank much ale before and after ; while their substantial and heavily built apologies for "traps" crowded the yard at the bottom of the gateway without a gate, and their horses filled the stables. All was old-fashioned without and within. Many of the strange overhanging stories of the neighbouring houses told of the Tudor age.

The Noah's Ark Inn stood, as it does now in its new form of the Posada, directly opposite the street that was once the only outlet to Stafford and Canal Streets, but when the Posada was "Noah's Ark," and had an old-fashioned, roomy inn yard, one could go through the gateway without a gate, cross the yard, and find one's way down a narrow passage

into Wheeler's Fold, immediately opposite to the gateway with a gate that led up to the old Swan Hotel yard and stabling, where John Wesley had a table brought out, and scandalised all good church people, who had never learned what truly constitutes apostolic descent, by preaching to a surging crowd in the open air, just as though he was no better than Peter or Paul. The Dean, if he had not farmed the Deanery to a money-changer, or a factor (it does not matter to my present purpose which was in residence at the time), and gone away altogether, would never have thought of doing anything of the kind. Whether the back entrance to the King's Head, in King Street, then opened out in anything like the apology for a ginshop it afterwards became, by the side of the gateway to the back of the Swan, the oldest inhabitant saith not, but something in the shape of the Pig and Whistle was in existence a little higher up the fold ; so that when the Wesleyans looking out for a site for a chapel raised their tabernacle at the back of the Noah's Ark Inn, faced the back of the Swan and the King's Head, and had the Pig and Whistle and the forerunner of the Greyhound as right and left-hand supporters, they were certainly not troubled with that blue ribbon prejudice to public house propinquity which brings ruin to licensed victuallers in these days. But then what they wanted in disrespect for the public-house they made up in absolute horror of the theatre, and it so happened that the only theatre in Wolverhampton then, and for long after all who had been saved in Noah's Ark Chapel had got out of it, was to be found in the Swan Inn yard ; and across the narrow contortion of a separating gullet which formed that part of Wheeler's Fold the roar of the clown on the stage on one side must have mocked the prayers of many a "band" meeting on the other. The seeming anomaly of such a site for a chapel is accounted for by fidelity to the Wesleyan direction to go first where most wanted, in the Wesleyan sense of wants and needs. Besides, the addition of the chapel to Noah's



2

"HERE ON MARKET DAYS SUBSTANTIAL FARMERS AND GRAZIERS CONSORTED WITH FAT BUTCHERS," ETC.—P. 15.

Ark only corresponded with Christian progress on the ark of old, when brutes went in and came out brutes, while the Wesleyans could boast that hundreds went into Noah's Ark Chapel brutes, and came out decent Christians.

It may be objected that the Ark had the advantage in variety. I don't know that. To one who has not the benefit of a "celestial" residence in this world one Chinese is the very image of every other Chinese, and there seems no distinction between them; but live among them, and personal distinctions will come out as plain as the nose on the face (and the Mongolian nose is plain enough, in all conscience). So to a rigid Churchman, who would no more enter a chapel than a Catholic who swears by St. Peter's would think of going to St. Paul's, one Methodist is just as bad as another, and equally destitute of reasonable religion and common sense; but how astonished he would be to find, if he were only to make himself familiar with them, that there are archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons of all sorts and sizes and every crank of temper falling in and falling out with all sorts of churchwardens, and sidesmen—some on one side and some on the other—with all sorts of sextons, vergers, beadles, and any number of clerks vociferous of "Amen," just as there are to be found at church! True, they are not in the same form, but they go on very much in the same way, and play very much the same antics. One may transplant a Russian proverb, and truthfully show, with many a modern instance, that "Scratch a Wesleyan and you will find a Churchman."

I don't mean for a moment to assert that you will find the same variety in a full, grown-up, know-how-to-behave-itself sort of a Wesleyan chapel of to-day that Dr. Perry went to study in Noah's Ark. He was the "mad doctor" of Wolverhampton, which means, of course, that he was not mad himself, but doctored other people who were. He was, too, unlike "mad doctors" in these days, reasonable enough not to believe that everybody was mad but himself. He was

a man of some mark, being a first cousin to "a man made of money" of the same name, who, with his brother, lived and carried on business as a factor in a great house in Victoria Street, then Cock Street. He was not a rich man, though he, too, kept a large house—a house as large as the Junction Inn, which was some years ago built upon its site at the right hand of the junction of the Cannock Road and Stafford Street. He was of kin to the Perrys of Bilston—a rather numerous family there, some known as "of the Gate," and others "of the Corner."

Dr. Perry was a Churchman himself, and his Bedlam was so far conducted on Church of England principles that he had Sunday services in the lucid intervals of a mad parson confined on the premises. But lunatics, like criminals, are of all religions, and the Wolverhampton lunatic asylum had a notable local instance of Wesleyanism in the person of Miss Loxton. She was a relative of the Loxtons of Wednesbury, and her brother carried on business as a maltster in Salop Street. The Loxtons were ever staunch Wesleyans, and this brother and sister were no exception to the rule. Among the many remarkable restorations to reason which Dr. Perry could boast was that of Miss Loxton from the temporary alienation of mind from which she suffered. She was among the more ardent of the Methodists of her day, and played no small or ineffective part both in Noah's Ark Chapel and its successor in Darlington Street.

As already premised, Dr. Perry was not a Methodist, but he evidently took a deep interest in the rise and progress of Methodism, and the phenomena with which it was accompanied; having been a spectator of its earlier and stormier out-door gatherings, at one of which he told of having seen Mr. Wesley pelted with rotten eggs, and having also been a frequent attendant at the services held in Noah's Ark Chapel. By the phenomena accompanying the progress of early Methodism I mean those allegations of supernatural visitation, possession, and afflictions, which so puzzled Mr.

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John Wesley, and are found so frequently recorded in his Journal by Mr. Wesley himself without note or comment, as though, like Hamlet, he was content to believe there were "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Dr. Perry must have taken a more practical view of the allegations of visions and visitations to which so many of the early Methodists in their lovefeasts so frequently ascribed their completed conversion. Many accounts of such alleged supernatural appearances to early Wesleyans in Wolverhampton are still current ; and I give one as I have received it from the subject of it himself, who expressed his conviction after an elapse of some sixty years that it was no work of the imagination. The matter is still more interesting from the fact that the relater was a grandson of Dr. Perry. Thomas Perry at the time was but a boy, living with his father, who carried on business as a locksmith in a house adjoining the old Baptist Chapel, in Temple Street, Wolverhampton. His mother had recently died, and is reverently spoken of by her son as a most pious and worthy woman, whose example and precepts deeply impressed themselves upon his youthful mind. His father was regarded as "worldly minded," and had no sympathy with the religious disquietude of his son. Thomas made the acquaintance of some of the leading pietists among the Wesleyans, attended Noah's Ark Chapel, and was offered much consolation and encouragement, but they failed to relieve him of the load he says he felt was weighing on his conscience, or to convince him that his sins were forgiven. One evening, when only about twelve years of age, he was invited to the Lord's table at Noah's Ark Chapel, but believing that such a sinner as he was unworthy to partake of the ordinance, he went forth into the country, then much more open and more contingent to the heart of Wolverhampton than it is now, and, kneeling beneath a tree in a meadow, began to pray. He had prayed long and fervently, when, he is convinced, he suddenly saw on an illuminated



spot in the heavens a ladder, which angels were ascending and descending, while Jesus stood at the side. In a moment the vision vanished, and young Thomas Perry rose relieved from his load, and returned home in a frame of mind that caused his father to regard him as temporarily deranged, and to send him to bed to calm himself. Though he readily obeyed the paternal injunction and went to bed, sleep came not, but in its place a supernatural light. The next morning he opened his Bible at random, and the first words that met his eye were, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me," which he held to be a direct command to him to care not how men might regard the narrative of what he had seen, or fall away from him or their own faith—he was to follow on in the path into which he had thus been divinely led. He believed it then, he believes it now, and with whatever incredulity such a narrative may be received in these days, it was but one of the very many told at Noah's A Chapel in the olden time.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PREACHERS IN THE ARK.

IN the days of Noah's Ark Chapel the more ardent of the worshippers there fervently believed that Divine forces were as directly brought to bear on the punishment of those who fell away from or denied the "faith once delivered to the saints" as in the turning of sinners into saints. Here is one story told me by an old lady who herself came out of the Ark when its occupants found a permanent resting place on a miniature Mount Ararat in Darlington Street. The circumstances came under her own observation, she vouched for the facts, and, whilst being a shrewd old lady ready enough to detect and expose shams, she has no doubt whatever that the unhappy carpenter of whom she spoke was the subject of a special visitation of Divine wrath. His name was Mason, and he was a comparatively young and unmarried man, whose habits and conduct were as exemplary as his professions of faith at lovefeasts and band and class meetings were full and fervent. One day he was at work at a large house at the corner of Snowhill and George Street, then tenanted by Miss Scott. She was a lady of means, an ardent Churchwoman, and therefore—in those days, at least—a great despiser of Methodist pretensions. She accosted the Wesleyan carpenter while at work, and said, "Mason, do you believe that a

person may in this life have an assurance that his sins are forgiven?" Whether anxious, from greed of gain, to propitiate the favour of one able to find profitable employment for those she favoured, or ashamed to acknowledge a faith despised by the learned and respectable of society, he bluntly replied in the negative, and was pleased for awhile to find himself counted by the lady as a sensible man. His pleasure was short, for at the moment of his denial of his faith "the devil took possession of him," and never left him until he had worried him out of his life. That was the belief of Noah's Ark Chapel, and great was the dread that came over the majority of its frequenters. The facts were sad and terrible enough. The man, at the end of his day's work, returned to his lodgings, and woke in the night a raging maniac, asserting that horrid imps were clutching at his neck, and he refused all nourishment, declaring that everything he attempted to swallow, or that was forced upon him, burnt and scalded his throat. Sometimes his paroxysms were so violent that, if not forcibly held in his bed, he would rush from it downstairs and dash his hands in, and try to force his body on to, the fire in the grate. There were pretty frequent congregations of Wesleyans around his bed, praying and singing, and shouts of "Lord, save Ben Mason" would drown the curses which, as the Wesleyans believed, the devil that possessed Mason poured from his mouth on those who thus sought to snatch his soul from eternal perdition. Mason, in his less violent moments, countenanced this belief, asserting that a demon within him, and devils round about him, destroyed all the good the Wesleyans sought to do, and that his salvation was hopeless. The Wesleyans, however, were none the less watchful and prayerful, but at the end of some six months Mason died raving mad, a terrible warning to all within the ark of the wrath against liars, especially against those who belied the faith.

That this belief of demoniacal possession was common to the teachers and the taught, the leaders and the led of

Noah's Ark Chapel, is shown by the fact that local preachers and "leaders" of the "society" were the most constant watchers at the bedside of Mason. Notably among them was John Tyrer, an artist on wood and canvas as well as on japan ware. He brought his art with him to Wolverhampton from London, and was for many years a master manufacturer in the days when wondrously painted and gilded coal "vases" and boxes were unknown, and skill in stamping tea trays was in its infancy; the bottom of the trays being in the greater number of instances "paned" on to the rim, or raised border. He made such trays and painted them in Bond Street until bad trade and bad debts compelled him to call his creditors together, when he assured them that he would never rest satisfied until he had paid them twenty shillings in the pound. They believed him, and he was a man to be believed. He carried honesty in every feature of his fine, manly face, subdued and rendered impressive by traits of gentle feeling that made him "every inch a gentleman." The truthfulness of this figure of speech was strengthened by height of stature, proportion of limb, gentle bearing, and kindly address. His piety was free from all ostentation, and his life was modelled on his religious and moral profession. His mind—whatever narrowness some might find in his faith—was capacious and shrewd, and he was a forcible and effective preacher. He kept his word with his creditors, paying them in full out of the income he received from the situation he took in the firm of the Fearncombes, japanners, of the Dudley Road. He lived to complete his fiftieth year of ministry as a local preacher among the Wesleyans, and the jubilee was celebrated at the New Village Chapel at Ettingshall, where his local preaching brethren presented him with a purse of fifty sovereigns.

Much such another man was another Noah's Ark local preacher of the name of Jackson. He, too, prayed at Mason's bedside, and was an extremely good and most

effective preacher, his pulpit discourses being greatly admired, and proving highly acceptable. He was a malt mill maker from Birmingham, carried on business at the top of Stafford Street, and by honourable trading, thrift, and industry, amassed means to enable him to send two sons to the University. They became clergymen of the Church of England, and the father eventually followed them into the Establishment.

Of the same manner of men, but more remarkable for his quiet goodness than his intellectual gifts or pulpit utterances, was Mr. Bradney; and he must, from the kindly remembrances of him that have come down from father to son even to these days, have done much good in his time, especially in subduing the more excitable and directing the force of their faith into practical and useful channels. He was a master lockmaker of good position, first in Brickkiln Street, and subsequently in Temple Street.

Samuel Williams, who did a great work in Christianising and civilising Hell Lane, came very early on the Noah's Ark Preachers' Plan, which was headed, so far as local preachers were concerned, by the Riley whose preaching, pedestrian, and, when needed, pugilistic performances I have already referred to. Though Riley devoted so much time and attention to Wesleyan duties, he was nevertheless so diligent in business, and his business so prospered, that he was enabled to accumulate sufficient for the one who inherited it to live in independence. William Phillpotts, whose son took an active part in the promotion of Wolverhampton's Free Library, and is one of the more zealous members of its committee, was also among the earlier local preachers at Noah's Ark Chapel. He was an active, dapper little man, whose neatness was most remarkable in the pretty little handwriting of the brief heads of discourse written upon a card from which he preached his plain and practical little sermons. He was a brass dresser, and if he were as careful in dressing his brass as he was in dressing himself, he must have been a master

hand at his business. His working in brass did not result for him in an accumulation of gold, and he had the courage to be thankful for it, often saying with his quaint but kindly little voice, that the Lord had kept him poor to save his soul, lest, growing rich, he might lose it.

Among the later additions to the Noah's Ark Plan was Mr. Coleman, the first medical practitioner in Wolverhampton of that name, whose son now carries on the old practice in the old house in Salop Street, and represents the ward in the Town Council. Mr. Bunch, whose son afterwards became a partner with the late Mr. Coleman, was also on the Plan, and was an active worker in the methods by which the Noah's Ark Wesleyans made the best of both worlds, and improved this life while seeking to approve themselves meet for the life that is to come. Among preachers not of Wolverhampton who found a place on its Circuit Plan while Noah's Ark Chapel was afloat, is the still living William Hackett, of Bilston, whose four-score years do not prevent his taking his "appointments," and preaching a vigorous sermon. Apprenticed to a printer in Bilston, and as diligent in the setting up of metal as in the unfolding of Scripture types, he trod the laborious path that a poor apprentice must tread to become a successful master tradesman, and has many years been able to live retired from business, and devote himself more entirely to the gratuitous work to which so much of his life has been given of teaching and preaching and in many other ways advancing the cause of religion and temperance in the world. When he began to labour with the Wesleyans, Wolverhampton Circuit comprehended all Bilston, yet boasted but two small chapels—the little Noah's Ark, and the lesser chapel in Temple Street, Bilston. Bilston is now a circuit of itself, with several chapels, and Wolverhampton has two circuits, and each circuit many places of worship. Then there was Mr. Hackett's neighbour and friend, Benjamin Beebee, house painter and decorator, of Bilston, who afterwards gave a son to the Con-

nexion. Smith, of Coven, added a son to the local preaching body, showing that he set a good example to his own family as well as his neighbours.

Of travelling preachers that floated with Noah's Ark or visited it like birds of passage I have but meagre accounts. A story is told of the young Bird that was so fluttered by the venerable appearance of Wilkes, the tripe-seller, of Ettingshall, that mistaking him for a retired minister or clergyman, and anxious to approve himself before such a worthy, he changed his text and sermon in the pulpit. That same Bird was not a weakling either, as they who favoured the cause of the Reformers Everett and Griffith found to their cost when he came a second time to Wolverhampton, many years after, as Superintendent of its circuit. He could be as severe in speech as in act, and was a humorous and caustic Bird with a sharp beak for picking out the faults and foibles of human nature. It is told how once, during his ministry at Noah's Ark Chapel, band and singers rebelled, and, forsaking the choir seats behind, dispersed themselves tuneless in the pews in front of the pulpit. The Bird was not fluttered on this occasion, but as he gave out the number of his opening hymn regarded those before him with a knowing eye that winked mischief as he, according to Methodist custom, proceeded to read the first two lines for the benefit of those who could not read. Very clear was his voice, and there was a sort of two-edged-sword-cutting quality about it, as he recited—

"Let those refuse to sing  
Who never knew our God."

The rebel minstrels looked as though they were pierced by a sword, and felt that the one voice in the pulpit was too much for all the voices and all the sounds of vibrating strings and brazen metal the united choir could bring to bear.

Then there was Thomas Wilkes, who was born as far back as 1768, and appears to have led an irreligious life until he

was some thirty-five years of age, when he came under the influence of the evangelical preaching which distinguished the pulpit of Darlaston church at the commencement of the present century. Residing at Ettingshall he joined the Wesleyan society which Samuel Williams soon after formed there, and was a frequent attendant at the service at Noah's Ark Chapel, Wolverhampton. Though looking so wise, learned, and venerable as to make young Bird flutter in his pulpit, he was so far illiterate that not until he felt the need of making himself useful to the youngest of the scholars in the Sunday School opened in Hell Lane did he thoroughly learn his alphabet and master the art of combining its letters into words. The department, however, in which he was most useful, was that of missionary collector, an unpaid office, to the duties of which he mainly devoted eighteen years of his life, and collected in weekly pence during that period a total of £385. The least amount he collected in any one of those years was upwards of £11, but in no year did he obtain more than £50, the average being some £21 per annum. Two years previous to his death, while engaged in this work, he was seized with paralysis, and with difficulty reached home. There he afterwards had a second attack, which deprived him of the use of his right side, and obliged him to take to his bed, where he remained until death released him, dying in the 75th year of his age, on the 26th of October, 1843.

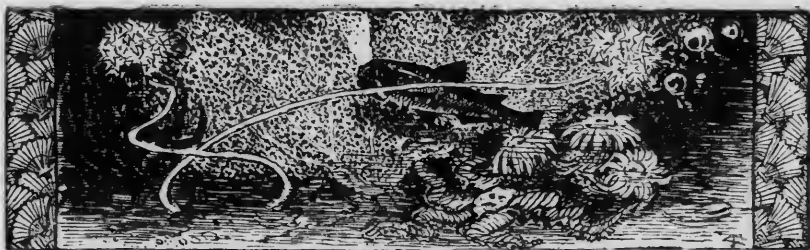
As for Gideon Ouseley, he was the great Revivalist of those days, and he, more than any other agency, so revived Noah's Ark Chapel as to make it too small for the numbers who came to worship there, and so set them seeking a larger place. He was an Irishman, and died in Dublin at the ripe age of 78, after forty-seven years' unceasing arduous missionary labour, which won for him the admiration and respect of every denomination of Protestant Christians. His first religious impressions were produced in the year 1791 by the careful perusal of the Holy Scriptures, and he often



mentioned Young's works, he "Night Thoughts," especially his "Infidel Reclaimed," and "The Centaur not Fabulous," as singularly beneficial to him at that period. Convinced that it was his duty to impart his knowledge of salvation to others, he in 1792 commenced his career as an outdoor preacher, his first address being delivered in a churchyard to a large multitude gathered at a funeral. Then he travelled the fairs, market towns, and villages of Ireland, availing himself of his intimate acquaintance with the Irish language to instruct the natives, many whom he thus missioned from Roman Catholicism afterwards becoming zealous Protestant ministers. Like John Wesley, he was often in sore peril from raging mobs. On one occasion, while preaching in the town of Loughrea, in the county of Galway, he stood with his back to the wall which encloses the barracks. The mob, instigated, it is said, by a priest, began pelting him with stones, but finding that this did not discompose him, they broke through the circle formed by the few friends who surrounded the chair on which he stood, and pulled him down. With difficulty a sergeant got him inside the barracks, and closed the gate. The mob were preparing to destroy the barracks, and, the sergeant fearing he would not be justified in defending him, Ouseley prepared voluntarily to go forth, but was retained by a superior officer, who ordered out the soldiers and drove off the rioters. One day in the streets of Monaghan a Romanist spat in his face, and others were laying hold of the man, when Ouseley, wiping away the insult, begged he might be allowed to remain until the close of the service. On another occasion at Tuam he had two teeth knocked out by a severe blow from a piece of hard turf thrown at him. He spat the teeth into his hand, and proceeded with his discourse without interruption except occasional pauses to get rid of the blood which flowed into his mouth. His frequent journeys through England and Scotland drew thousands around him, and no one has ever more success-

fully worn the mantle which fell from the shoulders of Whitefield and Wesley. In Wolverhampton the enthusiasm was immense, and his simple, artless, colloquial addresses were uttered with such earnest, impressive feeling that they were frequently brought to an untimely close by the need for the preacher to go personally to the comfort and consolation of the many of his hearers who were stricken by the power of his words. He was no uncultured missionary, but possessed a clear and comprehensive mind stored with various learning, and improved by reading and close thinking. He was, too, as much an author as a preacher, and his controversial works were widely read and quoted by the learned in theology. His death caused a profound sensation, which was felt even in the backwoods of America, where many an emigrant thanked God for the day he first heard Gideon Ouseley.

Last, but not least, came the celebrated Rev. John Newton to Noah's Ark Chapel. After a generous collection, the fruits of his eloquence, he bade the congregation get out of that "nasty dirty place ;" and the sight and smell of the manure heaps of the surrounding inn yards, and the foul ways that led to the Ark, must have given physical force to the good advice.



## CHAPTER V.

### MUSIC AND MEN OF THE ARK.

A BIRD in the pulpit may be all very well, but he cannot do all the singing; and the congregation that is not led by a choir, plentifully supplied with instrumental music, is apt to break down or go astray with the tune, be that congregation Methodist or not. Wesleyanism is, and has ever been, attractive for its hearty congregational singing, but it has ever been careful to have the singing led by trained voices in the choir gallery or "singing seat;" the leader being an officer of no small import in the society. Noah's Ark Chapel could boast of no organ, but long before it became a billiard-room it could boast of as fine a band of instrumental music as could be found in any church or chapel of the day for miles around. The instruments in use were valued at £70; old Mr. Coley, the father of the living lockmaker at Heath Town, of that name, being proud of a fine and valuable flute, whereon he discoursed good music Sunday after Sunday. There was a second flute, rather a collection of fiddles, and some of the more flourishing and choral tunes were overcome with the strength of trombones. Fugues were often the failing of both band and chorus, but nevertheless the combined instrumental and vocal force was very attractive, and contributed no little to the excellence of the life-like worship which was once in

Wolverhampton to be found nowhere outside of Noah's Ark Chapel. The choir was a most respectable one. An early Mayor of the borough, Mr. Jeremiah Wynn, was a counter-tenor in the choir of Noah's Ark Chapel, and there sat and sang by his side another man of note, old Mr. Robert Perks, the principal founder of the edge-tool-making firm of Perks & Co., of the Bilston Road. Mr. Perks lived then and for years after in the white house which still stands at the junction of the Commercial and the Bilston Road, but at that time it stood in pleasant garden ground, and all was country around; and a manufacturer who could live in such a house was no small man at that time among his fellow-townsmen. For position and influence he stood at the head of the Wesleyan body of those days, and remained a member of it to the day of his death. By no means so large in moneyed means and social distinction was old Moses Bayliss, who also lived and died a Wesleyan, bequeathing to the cause sons who housed fortunes in the great works still flourishing in their name by Monmore Green, and who have been equally faithful to Wesleyanism. Others there were then undistinguished among the congregation who subsequently rose to no little local fame and fortune. Notably there was the late Mr. Joseph Parke, to whose faithful churchwardenship for so many years "the Old Church" of Wolverhampton owes so much. When he came from Brewood to serve his apprenticeship to Mr. Smart, the principal printer of the town, he soon found his way to Noah's Ark Chapel, and if he afterwards went to the church, and learnt to rely on bishops with an entire trust that John Wesley never exhibited, and to exhibit a reverence for lords temporal as well as spiritual which Dissenters rarely show, he carried with him to the church a fervour and a faith, and a fidelity to attendance on "the means of grace," which, as a general rule, were more marked characteristics of good Methodists than good Churchmen. Mr. Smart was then the leading printer and bookseller in Wolverhampton, and



SOME OF THE CHAPEL CHOIR.—P. 31.

the only newspaper proprietor in the county on that side of Stafford ; the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, having been started by him, remaining his property until he died. Mr. Parke succeeded to the printing and bookselling business, and though the paper went into other hands, his name, as long as it betokened a living entity, was found in the imprint as one of the publishers.

Mr. Parke, however, was not the only printer who went into and came out of Noah's Ark Chapel. Old Philip Denman, printer, of the High Green, was a pretty constant attendant on its services, but when the good folks of the Ark went to Darlington Street, he eventually went off to St. John's Church, doubtless attracted there by the ministry of the Daltons. Among rising tradesmen in the town who attended the Noah's Ark services was Mr. James, afterwards Alderman, Langman, whose son James subsequently attained the still higher municipal dignity of Mayor of Wolverhampton.

Of those the memory of whom has almost entirely passed away were Mr. Higgit, clothier, of the High Green ; a hatter who made hats on his premises there, named Brown ; and the only cork-cutter in the town, Hudson, who carried on business for a time in a little old-fashioned house and shop at the corner of the passage which connected old Lichfield Street with St. Peter's Walk. Mr. William Brown, grocer, of the High Green, was treasurer of the Sunday School, which numbered among its teachers Sarah and Charlotte, the two handsome and amiable daughters of a tallow chandler, named Barnett, who then carried on business in Queen Street, and who was himself for some time a superintendent of the Sunday School. That school, as well as a day school, was held in premises in Wheeler's Fold, on the same side of the way as that on which the old chapel stood, but divided from the chapel by the Pig and Whistle. The school premises stood back from the line formed by the other buildings on the same side of the way, and had but dark

and gloomy interiors. They were of such proportions as to have been subsequently divided into several small houses, and to be equal to the accommodation of some 600 children, for I have before me the programme, printed by Philip Denman, on eight 12mo pages, of the last Noah's Ark Sunday School anniversary sermons. The title page sets forth :—

"On Sunday, April 11, 1824, Sermons will be preached at the Methodist Chapel, Noah's Ark, Wolverhampton, for the benefit of the Sunday Schools attending that place ; by the Rev. H. T. Hopwood, of Stourport. Service to begin at three o'clock in the afternoon, and at half-past six in the evening."

On the second page is printed :—

"Number of Children—

Boys.....	330
Girls.....	236
Total.....	<hr/> 566

The School is still open for those, who are desirous of instruction.

The smallest Donation will be thankfully received by Mr. BROWN, Market Place, Treasurer."

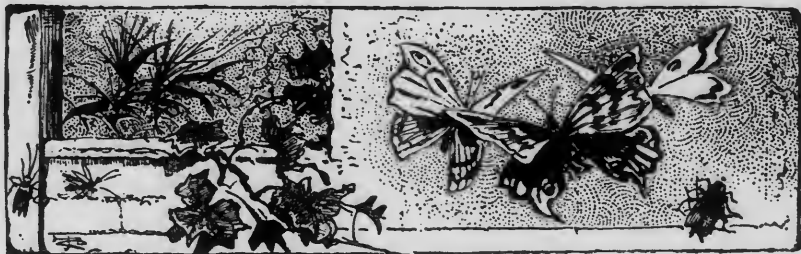
The band and choir were in their prime then, and under the able management of Mr. Smith, the father of Mr. Jeremiah Smith, japanner and tin trunk maker, of the Dudley Road. His grandfather was a Wesleyan before him, and the Smiths have rented the same seats in Darlington Street Chapel since its opening, now nearly sixty years ago. The Smiths were giants in the days of the Ark, for he who led the singing was tall of stature, and had two brothers in the Wesleyan ministry who towered over six feet, and a proud man was their father as he walked through the town between two sons of such proportions in the ministry of the sect he so espoused. His other son in the singing seat at Noah's

Ark was no less proud of his position, and the Fawcett anthems gave an opportunity for display, of which we may be sure leader, band, and chorus took vigorous advantage. *That* Smith was a shoemaker, and there were several other shoemakers in the Noah's Ark of Wolverhampton. Notably old Hintsch, the chapel keeper; old Jack Manning; and last, not least, old Tunnicliffe, an active, esteemed, and useful member of the local Wesleyan society until he turned Reformer, and was "turned out." He is not to be confounded with Mr. Tunnicliffe who came up from the Potteries, and established the large business in porcelain pottery and glass, still flourishing under the direction of his son, in Victoria Street. Like his son, he was a staunch Wesleyan, and the first Sunday he was in Wolverhampton he went to Noah's Ark, and went with it to its final resting place in Darlington Street. Though not a shoemaker, he doubtless rejoiced to find so many shoemakers in Noah's Ark, for a thorough-going Methodist shoemaker must be next in rarity to a genuine Jewish convert. Noah's Ark could boast both, and it further boasted that if the Wesleyans could not convert a shoemaker nobody else could. If Noah's Ark was asked for proof of this, it pointed to an old sinner of the craft named Preston, who dwelt in Bushbury, but dealt at Wolverhampton. The Wesleyans tried to convert him, but in vain; the Church took him in hand, but could make nothing of him; and then the Roman Catholic priest who was chaplain to the Vernons, at Mosely, went at him with "the old faith," and finding all his weapons of theological warfare were in vain, fetched to him on his deathbed that "great gun," Dr. Milner, who had flourishingly fired his "End of Controversy" from Chillington House, in North Street; but only to find the end of all argumentation in that old shoemaker Preston, who to all controversy had but one answer, drawn from long enduring skill in his trade, "Keep the upper leather right, and the insole is sure to be right."

Whether there was logical sagacity, or but mere simplicity



in this contention of old Preston, I will leave the reader to determine. He may also determine whether the strange sight which met William Phillpotts' eyes when he went one Sunday from Noah's Ark Chapel to Hell Lane Sunday School was due to primitive simplicity or the want of it. When he arrived at the school house he found it empty. Not a scholar was there. As the scholars showed no disposition to come to the teacher, he deemed it to be the duty of the teacher to go in search of the scholars. He had not far to look ; for, lo ! the canal ran at the back of the school house, and there he found all the big boys and girls preparing to bathe.



## CHAPTER VI.

### GETTING OUT OF THE ARK.

OF those who were alive when "Noah's Ark" came into existence and were therein afterwards saved, there is, I believe, but one now remaining—Mr. Phipps, who is still a living member of the old society in its now nearly sixty-year-old new meeting place in Darlington Street. He was born in the month of December, 1796, and will, therefore, be eighty-eight years of age if he survive his next birthday; and to judge by his health and his looks he gives stout promise of seeing many a birthday yet.\* His life and career are a fine example of the good and useful men that Wesleyanism made out of very raw material in Wolverhampton in the days of "Noah's Ark." Mr. Phipps was born at Broseley, was never sent to school, and as soon as he could go was apprenticed to a collier, and sent down a coal pit. The pains, perils, and penalties of such a position for a poor boy in those days were mitigated by the fact that his master was the husband of his mother's sister, and that Methodism had done something for the family at Broseley. During a long apprenticeship getting coal seems to have been all he got; getting that now at Broseley, now at Monmore Green, just as trade served his master, and he could find employment in one or the other place; man and boy being more often

\* This was written in September, 1884.

at Monmore Green than at Broseley. In 1816, however, Phipps was at the latter place, when the Rev. David Cornforth came as the second travelling minister to the Madeley Circuit, telling his hearers that it was true he was a new preacher, but he preached from the Old Bible. Young Phipps went to hear the new preacher at Broseley, and was so impressed by him that, on his return to Monmore Green, a few weeks afterwards, when on his way one Monday evening to meet a brother collier at the Pig and Whistle, in Wheeler's Fold, he stopped short at Noah's Ark Chapel, and went into the week-night service. At the close of the service notice was given that Gideon Ouseley, the great Irish Revivalist, was coming, and would hold special services on the following Friday evening. Young Phipps was not only one of the congregation, but also one who stopped to the penitents' meeting which followed the service. Then Gideon Ouseley came out of the pulpit and held converse with those who seemed most concerned, exhorting them, praying with them, and comforting them. He was assisted in this work by Mrs. Milward, the wife of the superintendent minister, and several of the local preachers, of whom Charles Williams, of Hell Lane, specially busied himself with young Phipps as a collier of Monmore Green, with whom he was doubtless well acquainted. Gideon Ouseley preached again on the following Sunday evening, and Phipps was again one of his hearers, and went into the vestry when they who were concerned about their salvation were invited thither. The vestry took up one corner of the little chapel, at the foot of the pulpit stairs, and could not find room for a score of penitents. Among the dozen or so who went into it on this occasion with young Phipps was Mr. John Perks, the brother and partner of Mr. Robert Perks, and who afterwards became a partner in the great Thorneycroft firm, and lived a wealthy man at Slade's Hill.

As a result of his conversion and enrolment as a member

of the society, young Phipps found himself associated with many, a one whom I have already named, and others of some note in their day yet to be named. Notably, there were Dr. Thompson, a medical man, of the Lich Gates, to whom Mr. Dunn, the father of the present medical practitioner of that name, was apprenticed; Mr. Newman, a leader at Noah's Ark, and his son, a superintendent of its Sunday School, progenitors of the member of that name of the existing Town Council of the Wolverhampton of these days; and Mr. Slack, the draper, of the High Green, whose sister Dr. Coleman married. To make himself more worthy of a society numbering such members and their friends, young Phipps did his best to master the mysteries of reading and writing in the Sunday School; but those were not the days of eight hours, and the week's toil in poisoned air did not fit the brain for much Sunday study; so Mr. Phipps had to rely on other qualities for his advancement in the world than what was to be got out of as much of "the three R's" as had been taught him first in Noah's Ark, and in the Hell Lane Sunday School; for his experience of colliers and collier life soon caused his transference as a Wesleyan from Wheeler's Fold, Wolverhampton, to Hell Lane, Ettingshall, where he who had thus been led into good works soon became himself a leader. But poor and ignorant as he was, he was as wise as his educated "brother," Dr. Coleman, in those things wherein learning goes for nothing; for while the well-instructed doctor fell in love with Miss Slack, the ill-instructed collier became enamoured of her maid, and both couples were happily married.

There came a time when the collier was brought from the pit disabled by an accident, and deemed himself a fortunate man when a relative of his wife, who speculated in turnpikes, offered husband and wife fifteen shillings a week to mind a toll-house at Birmingham. Little as the income was, by the time the speculation came in a few years to an end the thrifty couple had saved £10, and then

they accepted the offer of Mr. Slack, who invested the money he made in linendrapery in vapour baths, to attend to baths he set up at Worcester. When that speculation ended Mr. Phipps and his wife had increased their very small fortune to £23, and for a time were puzzled what to do with it. More practical than speculative, Phipps would have preferred to have put it out to sure interest, while adding what he could to the principal, from the fruits of reliable day labour. There was, however, no such employment open to him but the coal pit; and when even in these days the man who has once cleared himself of its dark and dangerous depths may be excused if he prefers to go to work anywhere else than down a colliery shaft, he who had been once brought up a shattered man some fifty years ago would have been bold indeed to willingly go down again in search of bread. No wonder, then, that Mr. Phipps and his wife held a council of ways and means, and that a goodly part of the £23 went in the provision of green and other grocery, to stock a shop, and the purchase of a cow, the milk of which Phipps distributed to customers. Hard work and careful dealing, and small profits but quick returns, gradually increased capital and business; the coal trade was added, and, slowly but surely, Mr. Phipps became a comparatively flourishing tradesman, who put by money and put up houses. He did not neglect Methodism while diligent in business, but gave to his religion both of his time and of his money, coming to be leader of three large and important classes. About ten years ago the apprentice who had been thought too poor to subscribe a penny a week at Noah's Ark Chapel, advanced £1,000 towards paying off the debt upon its successor in Darlington Street, to be repaid by way of annuity upon his life.

I have told his story at some length as another illustration of how much Wolverhampton owes to Old Noah's Ark, not only in men who made more or less money, and in making it helped to create and distribute wealth around

them, but men who by steady industry, good moral character, and no little free giving and working for love of God and love of man, helped to create and distribute morals and manners more precious to a town and neighbourhood than silver and gold.

Such good example and such good work soon filled Noah's Ark Chapel to overflowing. At the utmost it would scarcely hold 500, and though a good square, solid building, its fittings were none of the best or most comfortable even in those days, when chapel ease and adornment were little thought of, but a very short remove from the least seatable benches and pews went a long way on the road to satisfaction. Long before the society and congregation resolved to move, it was certain they must go. But where and how were they to go? Though there were among them many tolerably well-to-do people, whose well-being was of a solid and progressive character, the sum required to buy a site and to build thereon a large chapel was a matter for long and careful consideration. So, in deference to the advice of cautious brethren, the Old Meeting House in John Street was hired as a chapel-of-ease to the Ark, but was soon recognised as only an olive leaf of the better time coming. Eventually the eyes of the leading men were turned towards Darlington Street, then newly opened up. There were plenty of sites to be had there, for at first it was a houseless thoroughfare. There was no difference of opinion that the ground whereon Darlington Street Chapel now stands was the most eligible spot; and the good folks could make sure of the purchase money. They were by no means sure, however, of being able to effect the purchase. Though there were by this time so many respectable people among the Wesleyans of Wolverhampton, yet Wolverhampton as a whole did not yet much respect the Wesleyans, and the Church people were only too anxious to diminish Methodist influence, and cripple its advancement. One is surprised in these days to read of Wesleyan exhortations in the latter quarter

of the past and the first quarter of this century to reciprocal dealing among Methodists, ascribing to sectarian exclusiveness what was essential to self-preservation, for no one who was not a Wesleyan would in the earlier years of the sect deal with a Wesleyan if he could conveniently trade elsewhere; and in this respect Boycotting was known in "the old Black Country" long before it was introduced into Ireland. We wonder to read of any landholder now refusing from Church bigotry to sell a site for a little Dissenting chapel in an obscure village; but such bigotry was once as plentiful in the town as it is now scarce in the country; and even where a church-going landholder or his agent might be disposed to sell for such purposes, public opinion would not let him. It was so with the site in Darlington Street upon which the Wesleyans of Noah's Ark had set their hearts. Mr. Richard Fryer had the site for sale, and, left to himself, was liberal enough in such matters. Still he was a Churchman who troubled himself more with political than sectarian differences, and was a banker to boot, whose business and business prosperity lay among Church people, who would have regarded it as a sin and a shame to aid, directly or indirectly, in the furtherance of what they regarded as the pernicious principles and dangerous practices of the Methodists. The Wesleyans of "Noah's Ark," thus driven by moral—or, if the reader pleases, immoral—pressure, had recourse to an artifice common enough in our time for economic purposes among other corporations, lay and clerical, and delegated one of their number to become the purchaser, in trust for the society. The person chosen was Thomas Hentsch, shrewd in business as a shoemaker, who carried his shrewdness so successfully into this bit of business of the Wesleyan Society that he had soon paid the deposit on the purchase, and was ere long in possession of the much coveted site. The result showed the wisdom of the Wesleyans, for as soon as it became known that they proposed to build a chapel on the site Mr. Richard Fryer

was besieged by alarmed Church folks, who hoped to be in time to stop the sale. Rather glad that they were too late in the field, he, in response to all their representations as to the enormity of the Methodists coming into possession, assured his besiegers that "he did not care if the devil had the land, for he had got the money."

Nor was it, to write mildly, Church prejudice alone that the Methodists had to deal with. There was at that time none of that general brotherhood and hearty co-operation among Dissenting congregations of Nonconformists which prevails in these days. Nonconformists who were not Wesleyans were very staunch Calvinists, and, their dislike of Methodists having a theological ground, was perhaps deeper and sterner than that of Churchmen. Hence it was only with bated breath and but little hope that the Wesleyans who canvassed for subscriptions towards the erection of the new Methodist chapel made their request to any of the staunch Baptists or Congregationalists of the Wolverhampton of that day. Among the more energetic and venturing of such canvassers was Miss Loxton, of Salop Street. Coming from Birmingham one day she found herself seated on the coach by the side of one of the foremost and wealthiest of local Calvinists. She set forth the excellence of the object of her quest, and assured him that the smallest donation would be thankfully received. "O, indeed," was the curt response. "If you will send for it, I shall be glad to give you a farthing." He thought no more of the occurrence, and could only say, some weeks afterwards, when the unruffled lady presented herself at his residence, "Good day, Miss Loxton. And what can I do for you?" Miss Loxton replied, with a smile, "I have come for the farthing you so kindly promised towards the building of the chapel in Darlington Street." With a feeling of genuine repentance he wrote out and presented to her a cheque for £5.





## CHAPTER VII.

### THE END OF THE ARK.

IT was some time in 1824 that the foundation stone of Darlington Street Chapel was laid, but the ceremony thereat was in extent nothing compared to the laying of foundation bricks, for it was arranged that any member of the society or adherent of the cause who would lay upon it a thanksgiving offering according to his or her means should have the privilege of laying a brick, and there was a large number of amateur bricklayers who paid liberally for the mortar they used and the bricks they abused. As the chapel rose from its foundations, so the Wesleyans appear to have risen in the eyes of the public; for while the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, so far as my search can discover, contains no record of any precedent act, it devotes a dozen lines to the opening, which took place on Friday and Sunday, the 26th and 28th of August, 1825, and in his issue of the 31st of that month the editor of the paper had "the pleasure" of informing his readers that "the commodious and elegant chapel built by the Wesleyan Methodists in Darlington Street" was opened on the above days, when six "excellent sermons were preached on the occasion, and," adds the *Chronicle*, "while we congratulate our Wesleyan friends on the accomplishment of their object, we rejoice to add that the very liberal collection, amounting to £250,

reflects the greatest honour on the inhabitants of this town." Decidedly more honour than the collection of rotten eggs and brick ends which the inhabitants gathered for them when Wesley and his adherents first made their public appeals to the town. True, the church bells rang out a peal then, and were silent when Darlington Street Chapel was opened, but that very silence was significant ; for when they were rung it was not to greet John Wesley but to drown his voice ; and Mr. James Wynne, the father of the late Mr. Jeremiah Wynne, used to tell how he exerted himself to stop the peal, and give the great Church reformer a fair hearing. James Wynne was a sound Churchman, and "no mean citizen," a cooper of substance, carrying on his business in the old half-timbered house in High Street, where the late Mr. Gow until so recently dispensed drugs.

If James Wynne had left Noah's Ark in Wheeler's Fold some years before he left this world and the cooperage in High Street, it appears that it was not because he had ceased to be a follower of John Wesley, but because his followers had since the death of their great leader gone much further than he intended, and much further than so good a Churchman as James Wynne, the cooper, thought they ought to go. Could the long life of John Wesley have been stretched to the time when his followers finally and irrevocably separated from the Church by no longer resorting to the Establishment for Church rites and sacraments, and by providing for their administration among themselves by their own preachers, as well local as itinerant, he would doubtless have gone with them. The system of Methodism was not a theoretical and premeditated one, but a practical and extempore system, improvised by Wesley himself to suit the growing exigencies of his position, resulting alike from the growth of his missionary labours and the opposition, not to add the persecution, of the Church in behalf of which he laboured. His organisation in Great Britain and Ireland at least was never in his days an ecclesiastical organi-

sation, but one of the "societies" of earnest Christians to whom he was the last to have attributed any obligation to cease their connection with the State Church of which he was an ordained minister, or receive the sacraments of that Church from the hands of any other than its clergy. He tells himself how, "In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, viz. on Thursday, in the evening." This he called "the first Methodist Society;" and when its numbers multiplied, and similar societies sprang up in other parts of the kingdom, Wesley, for the greater facility of their working, and in order to ascertain the growth or otherwise of "grace" in the individuals composing them, divided the societies into "classes," each "class" having a "leader," whose duty it was to see each of the members of his class once a week, and to collect their voluntary subscriptions and pay them over to the "stewards" of the society. For preaching purposes the societies were grouped into "circuits," certain laymen who had been induced to give up their trades or callings and devote themselves wholly to preaching being appointed singly or by twos and threes, for twelve months, to itinerate through a circuit, their labours being supplemented by a fixed body of unsalaried preachers resident in the circuit, most of whom were also leaders, and known as "local preachers." Both salaried and unpaid were "preachers" only, not presbyters or priests; preachers who supplemented, not supplied, the place of the parochial clergy. They were not even Non-conformists, much less Dissenters; and the aggregation of

circuits into "districts," and the annual assembly of one hundred preachers in annual Conference, as provided for by John Wesley, did not in the slightest degree give an ecclesiastical character to the organisation, or raise any barrier between the Wesleyans and their parish churches.

Hence good and sound Churchmen like James Wynne could heartily enter into the work of the Methodist Society of Wolverhampton and still maintain their position as members of the parish church, going to the latter for those sacraments they believed only an episcopally-ordained clergyman could administer, and finding in the former that aid to religious life and individual righteousness which the parish church of their time, at least, failed to afford. The majority of his Methodist brethren were doubtless of his mind until the unvarying hostility of the Church to Methodism drove them further and further away from her pale and her influence; and when Wesley was dead, and a generation had grown up among his followers who knew the Church only by name, it was no wonder they clamoured that Wesley's preachers should be ministers indeed, and that those who preached to them the doctrines should also distribute to them the sacraments of the Church. There was no ecclesiastical claim or pretension on the part of the Methodist ministers in this. The demand for it grew among the members, and the preachers improvised administrations of baptism and the Lord's Supper to meet the exigencies of their position, just as John Wesley improvised each part of the Methodist organisation to meet the exigencies of his position as they arose.

One can easily understand, however, how good James Wynne, the cooper, brought up in the Church, and loving perhaps venerating the Church, felt scandalised when secular men of common callings came to handle things the Church permitted only ordained priests to touch. Uneducated or little educated men, busy in worldly calling, or but lately taken from it—men upon whom no presbyter, much

less a bishop, had or would lay hands, unless it were to thrust them into gaol for illegal preaching, thus assuming to themselves the functions of sacramental celebrants, was startling ; and James Wynne and others must be excused by the most thorough of Methodists in these days if, when they saw this, some three-fourths of a century ago, they rather shuddered and went back, wholly and solely, to the Old Church. True, that Church was so old as to be tumbling to pieces with moral and material decay ; what should have been sacred about it had been bought and sold in scandalous traffic, and it had become the poor, broken, bruised, scarcely recognisable remains of what once had been a living body with a soul in it. But the beauty that a great Greek sculptor chiselled is none the less beautiful to the eye of the antiquary because it comes down to him in ill-jointed pieces and destitute of an expressive and pointed feature, as the hero from the wars is none the less welcome and glorious for returning with a leg short and an eye out. The archæologist hoards his treasure none the less because time has defaced it or rendered it almost indecipherable, just as your mourning old man traces in secret those scarcely legible lines of faded ink or time-stained paper falling to pieces from the constant looking at, and longs for the last journey that will take him to her that wrote them. Ah, friend shoemaker, you would give nothing for that little old faded shoe, but it is all the world now to the childless one who shrines it in her drawer as for years she has enshrined in her heart the little one that once wore it. Yes, good Methodist, if you love your chapel where your grandfather worshipped, can you wonder that James Wynne and many like him went back to the Church that was founded ages before your grandfather was born ?

But he did a good deal for Wesleyanism before he did go back. The new house that John Wesley himself opened for them belonged to James Wynne. It was situated, as I have already described, on the southern side of Canal Street, then Rotton Row, but nearer to the Old Cheshire

Cheese, I am now assured, than the more modern Dog and Partridge. It is needless to look up any entry for it now, for what time and other change left, the Artisans' Dwelling Act has cleared away. In that house which John Wesley found so large, and which James Wynne turned into two or three when the Wesleyans went from the back of the Cheshire Cheese to the back of "Noah's Ark," and took its name, the good old man had many "a happy time," and Jeremiah must have spent many an hour there as best he could with his father, for many a time in his old age, as he passed out from High Street into Queen Square, he would point out to a friend the premises in which Mr. Jackson, grocer, lived, and which Mr. Edwards has converted into a cabinet and upholstery addition to his great drapery establishment, as the house in which John Wesley laid kindly hands upon his head.

Who lived in that house then, and how then old John Wesley and little Jeremiah Wynne came and met there, who can tell? Perhaps both were there in refuge from the mob, which, backing up the law, drove Methodists and meeting houses for so many years to obscure back places. But by building in Darlington Street in 1824, and opening their chapel there the year following, the Wesleyans of Wolverhampton "came to the front," and have not only kept there but have largely extended that front since. Their ministers—at least those who were paid for ministering—had before 1825 become "Reverends," and when they to whom they ministered gathered round them with £250 in giving hands, Wesleyans were no longer to be despised. They still spoke of themselves as "a society," but had come to regard themselves as a Church; and time has more than strengthened that feeling, for many years ago they and their children applauded on meeting in Darlington Street Chapel the still called "travelling preacher" who declared that the "orders" of the Wesleyan Church were as good as those of the Church of England.

The reverends who officiated on the 26th and 28th of August, 1825, were, in the morning of the former day, the Rev. John Lomas, of Bath (late classical master of Kingswood School); afternoon, the Rev. John Anderson, of London; and in the evening the Rev. Robert Wood, of Manchester. On the following Sunday the morning preacher was the Rev. W. Lord, of Birmingham; the Rev. Joshua Marsden, of Shrewsbury (late missionary to Nova Scotia), preaching in the afternoon; and the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, of Preston, the President of the Conference, in the evening. The utmost capacity of the chapel, which was estimated to hold from 1,200 to 1,500 persons, was taxed on each day, many coming from far and near to be present on the occasion, and finding much hospitality among those who had grown comparatively wealthy with Methodism. The building was pronounced, even by the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, "a very handsome edifice," and forming "one of the chief ornaments of the town." As the only change that has come over the building is an elongation to the rear, and an extension of the façade, the reader may judge of the fidelity of such criticism, or surmise the want of grace in the other public buildings in Wolverhampton in 1825, for himself. The horse-shoe form of the interior has been preserved, it having been simply extended in length. The seats of honour were in the gallery over the clock, of which the right and left-hand supporters were Mr. Robert and Mr. John Perks, the Wesleyan potentates of the Wolverhampton of those days, while in a large orchestral alcove at the other end sat and played and sung the band and chorus, under the conductorship of Mr. Smith, whose performances had drawn so many to "Noah's Ark." The chapel of that name no longer was left. Mr. Coleman had preached the last sermon in it on the 21st of August, and early in September, 1825, the premises were sold by auction, and ended their days as a billiard saloon,



## CHAPTER VIII.

### PREACHING AND PRAYING IN DARLINGTON STREET.

THERE must have been something attractive in the Reverends Titus Close and Thomas Ashton, who were the ministers stationed in the circuit when Darlington Street Chapel was opened, and more in the 'ism they served, to have drawn crowded congregations during the rough winter that followed the fair opening in August, and gave to Nonconformity an appearance of force and numbers it had never before put on in Wolverhampton. The influence of Mr. Close appears to have gone altogether with him when he removed to another circuit ; but the memory of his colleague has been handed down from father to son in Wolverhampton by his *sobriquet* of "Weeping Ashton." He had a power and a shower of tears always at command, and his weeping in the pulpit was only exceeded by his smoking out of it. With few exceptions, all the Methodist ministers of his day were great smokers, but Ashton appears to have been in this respect a phenomenon among his brethren. Nevertheless he was much respected by them, and once, while he was in Wolverhampton, no less an ornament to the Nonconformist and Methodist ministry than Dr. Adam Clarke paid him a visit. Of course the doctor found him smoking, and exclaimed, "Tommy, Tommy, you're at that nasty pipe again. There'll be no smoking in heaven,





"TOMMY, TOMMY, YOU'RE AT THAT NASTY PIPE AGAIN."—P. 52.

Tommy." Answered Tommy: "No, but there'll be many an old smoker there."

The two ministers who succeeded Messrs. Close and Ashton were, the father of Dr. Melson, now equally distinguished as a physician and Wesleyan local preacher, of Birmingham; and Arthur Jewitt. There was no weeping about either of them, but there appears to have been some wailing and gnashing of teeth, for a difference arose between them, and, the leading men at the chapel taking the side of Jewitt, Melson was, for the sake of peace and quietness, translated to another circuit at the end of twelve months. The wits of the congregation at the time appear to have been much exercised by the ministerial squabble, and the following rhyme, composed by the best verse-maker the chapel could find, has been handed down by way of oral communication:—

"Wicked Bob and Jack,  
Combined with Arthur's clack,  
And Tyrer he didn't lack,  
Likewise Doctor Quack,  
The Gospel for to rack,  
And send poor Melson back."

"Bob" and "Jack" were Mr. Robert and Mr. John Perks, who sat in the place of honour over the clock; the "clack" was of course that of Mr. Melson's disagreeing brother parson; "Tyrer" was Richard Tyrer, the popular local preacher of his day, and "Doctor Quack" was Mr. Coleman, medical practitioner and local preacher, of Salop Street.

The local preachers were an important and influential body of ministers, who took their share of preaching with the travelling preachers from the pulpit of Darlington Street Chapel itself. Old Riley, as long as his much-used legs would enable him to climb to the coveted height to which only the best or oldest of the "locals" were permitted to ascend, was always welcomed there by a smile of approval

on the faces of the majority of the congregation when they saw his time-and-labour-honoured features thus aloft. He was, however, one who knew his own educational deficiencies, and when at one week-night service he noticed, in the dim distance of the chapel, the Rev. Mr. Melson slip in and take an obscure seat, he cried out, to the astonishment of his hearers, "Nay, nay, I'm not going to be trapped by Mr. Melson," and insisted upon the Doctor's father coming into the pulpit and taking the service.

Old Tunnicliffe, the most popular of the local preachers of that time, except, perhaps, Richard Tyrer, was a man who thought that acquaintance with Lindley Murray would mar rather than embellish a sermon from a Wesleyan pulpit. When a now old Wesleyan local preacher was on trial, and was studying Lindley Murray to improve his grammar, Old Tunnicliffe came in. The young man rose and left him to the enjoyment of a chat with his (the young man's) father, but leaving the grammar on the table. Tunnicliffe took it up, and had no sooner seen the title than he threw the book down as though it were a reptile, and urged the young preacher's father to cast it into the fire, assuring him that it would be the ruin of his son.

This is an extreme instance of how old Wesleyan devotees despised intellectual culture. They did not take that feeling from their great leader, John Wesley, who, more than any scholar of his day, sought to diffuse knowledge and increase intelligence among the masses of his countrymen. Wherever, during his life, and also for many years after he was removed by death from the organisation he had formed, the Wesleyans set up a Sunday School, reading and writing, and sometimes ciphering, were taught in that school. It was so in the Noah's Ark Sunday School; and such elementary education continued to be given for a time when the school went with the chapel to Darlington Street. Here the school occupied a room constructed in the basement under the chapel, a room now devoted to class meetings

and the meetings of the Wesleyan Mutual Improvement Society ; but which then had rows of desks as well as forms, which clumsy fingers adorned with spilled ink. But in process of time, the Darlington Street Wesleyans began to regard reading and writing as mere worldly attainments which ought not to be taught in Sunday Schools. "The three R's" were in the eyes of the ruling elders of the day aids to trade, not to religion, and trades ought no more to be taught and learnt than followed on Sunday. And hence secular education on Sundays was discontinued.

Little William Phillpotts was the best read man among "the shining lights" of the pulpits and the classrooms of the circuit ; and several now oldish men, two or three of them in the ministry of the Church of England, bear grateful witness to the incentive to literary research and the acquisition of knowledge they received from him. There is before me at this moment the MS. of a lecture he delivered on the being of a God, and which is exceedingly creditable to one who had so few opportunities for culture ; and how much more he had read, even in his day, than many Wesleyans of these days of free libraries and cheap literature, is shown by the fact that the staunch Wesleyan who brought the MS. under my notice drew my special attention to some lines at the close, which he and his Wesleyan friends had, from the fact that they had never met with them elsewhere, come to the conclusion were the composition of the lecturer himself ; and that "Little William" must have been a great poet. A great poet he would have been had the verses been his own composition—at least as great a poet as Pope, from whom they were quoted, and one can easily understand how the lecturer was expansive and lifted up, taking his audience with him, as he declaimed a dozen lines before and after the sonorous text of the poet :—

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole ;  
Whose body nature is, and God the soul."

But if the Wesleyans of Darlington Street lacked poets,

they did not want for rhymesters, as I have already shown. Here is another verse, composed by one of the many sons of Richard Tyrer who did not follow in their father's footsteps and take to the pulpit :—

“ Plague on the parson's lengthy tongue ;  
He spins his sermons out too long ;  
The pudding's spoilt, the meat o'erdone,  
The 'taters have to water run.”

There were, as we have already seen, some “ strange birds ” among the local preachers of the Wolverhampton Circuit in the olden time, but I will conclude by a reference to one who, though no more, was not of the remote past—“ Tommy Wood,” as he was familiarly called. He was very fond of telling to his hearers the tale of his own conversion, describing how, alone in a long room one night, he became not only “ convinced of sin,” but terribly convinced that if he did not get conversion that night, he would go to the bottomless pit, and the devil would have him. As the thought flashed before his imagination, he saw the other end of the room glowing with Satanic fire, and the very mouth of hell appeared vomiting, from horrid jaws, flame and smoke and awful imps, and, finally, Satan himself. As the fiend approached, Tommy, in very fright, fell on his knees, clasped his hands in prayer, and at the cry, “ O, Jesus,” the devil turned tail, and, plunging into hell, took it with himself out of the room, and from that moment Tommy knew he was saved. With such a fiery experience it was no wonder that Mr. Wood preached very hot and fiery sermons, and that it was a common rhetorical pulpit trick with him to fix his eyes on one of his congregation, say very alarmingly, “ I have got a message from your brother in hell,” and then proceed to read and comment upon the fate of the rich man and Lazarus. But it was as a prayer leader rather than as a preacher that he finally distinguished himself. The ladies of Darlington Street

Chapel, anxious to keep alive and deepen the sense of piety in the congregation, organised mid-day prayer meetings, hoping that even manufacturers, merchants, and tradesmen might be able to snatch a few moments from business for prayer. Business, however, would let but few of the male sex go, but as Wood carried on his business in a little shop opposite the chapel, he was both able and willing to become an exception. So he went, and found Mrs. Thorneycroft, her sister, Mrs. Lacey, and the wives and daughters of many of the chief men of the congregation there. Tommy was only too ready to exercise his "gift in prayer," and poured forth an earnest petition that the Lord would make them all as wise and as blessed as Solomon, reminding the Lord how, though Solomon only prayed for wisdom, he received much more. "He prayed to Thee," exclaimed Wood, "neither for riches, nor for happiness, yet Thou gavest him both. Thou gavest him not only great wealth, but many wives."

To that prayer not one lady said "Amen!"



## CHAPTER IX.

### MEN AND MEANS IN DARLINGTON STREET.

JOHN WESLEY found in the Church of which he was a priest a—after its kind, at all events—perfect and well-matured ecclesiastical and sacerdotal organisation, glorious cathedrals and noble churches, and a splendid body of divinity and prayer. But the body was without a soul. Too many of the clergy were but forms and factors without faith, ministering mechanically to empty benches. Of Church, in the sense of a body of devoutly religious worshippers, there was little or none, for in no church or assemblage of Church members is there any more religion than that which priest or minister and people bring with them as capital to the common fund of worship, to be repaid by grace with interest. That men and women and children might be fitted and furnished with religion for the Church, go to the Church, and animate its body and its forms by their living spirit, was the end and the aim of the peripatetics of John Wesley, and, so far and so long as he could control them, of the Wesleyans. They were to be for the Church, so no one thought while John Wesley lived of making a Church for them. It must have been pretty clear to him, ere he died, that the Church would not have them; but he must have seen in that long life of his, going in and out unceasingly among the Churches and the peoples, that

Churches spring spontaneously from personal piety, and that in the end a Church would come out of his labours, though the Church for which he ploughed and sowed refused the increase. It was so, and the piety of the Wesleyans converted travelling preachers into clergymen, made bishops out of superintendents, and a more than synod or convocation out of a "Legal Hundred." But the life and soul of them all were the laymen and the lay elements whence this ecclesiastical and sacerdotal growth sprang, and though more than in the Established Church the material accretions of the Wesleyans are in the hands of their clergy, the worth and utility of those possessions are far more dependent upon the religious spirit and life of the laity. The appointment of ministers to every chapel that is built, so far as it is unencumbered property, is vested in the Legal Hundred. Its trustees are but trustees for the payment of its debts, and the keeping it in condition for the purposes of Wesleyan religious services. But if in this way the Legal Hundred are independent of the people, they are the more dependent on them ; for if the people provide not trustees and funds, then the chapels become useless walls and lifeless benches. The very ministers whom Conference alone can send to minister in the chapel would soon be as empty as the benches and as idle as the walls if the Wesleyans, through their class leaders and stewards, refused to make and collect the needful salaries, and in this way minister to the ministers. Thus, then, Wesleyan Methodism is dependent for barest means of material subsistence upon the men it raises up ; and any one of their ministers would maintain that the religion to be found in their chapels was simply the sum total of the individual contributions thereto of those frequenting them.

The problem of Wesleyanism, then, is how best it shall keep up a supply of such men to fill the places of those whom death removes from the world, or attractions take to the Church, for Wesleyanism is not only not Dissent, but its Nonconformity is but an accident due to circumstances



that no longer exist. That Wesleyans, and the children of Wesleyans, especially those whom Wesleyanism has made as useful to general as to Wesleyan society, should leave the chapel for the Church, is not to be wondered at, seeing that if, in Wesley's days, the Church had been what it is now, the chapel would have had no existence. Old Methodists may find ample persuasives in retrospect to remain true to a cause to which they owe so much, and the youth, whose world and its friendships are mainly to be found in the classroom and the chapel of its forefathers, may be little open to change, but the wealthy cannot bequeath their experience with their carriage to their children, and so, as time rolls on, often even in the second generation, the carriage rolls past the chapel and drives on to church.

The history of Darlington Street Chapel is rich in such men and typical of such changes. In its earlier years, as already noted, the places of honour above the clock were filled by Robert and John Perks. They had risen in the world with Methodism in Wolverhampton. They had gone from the little smithy of their father in the little fold no longer to be found opposite the Old Hall, which no longer abuts on what is now known as Garrick Street, to their great works in the Bilston Road. Robert was, if possible, the more determined Wesleyan of the two, contributed largely of his substance to bring Wesleyanism from the back in Wheeler's Fold to the front in Darlington Street, and was the first there to take the unprofitable post of treasurer-steward, which meant that, more or less, that same steward of the money of his religious brethren must put his hand in his own pocket when nothing was left of what they had given him from theirs. In this respect Robert appears to have played the part of a faithful steward, in the full acceptance of the Wesleyan use of the office, and when his part was played out, his brother John ever felt, if only as one of the trustees, that the responsibility lay largely with him. At least, so he told Mr. George Benjamin Thorneycroft

when that gentleman, holding like offices in the society, one day expressed to his friend and partner his admiration of their common place of worship. Mr. John Perks assented, but lamented how much it was in debt, and how burdensome was the duty he felt devolved upon him of finding ways and means of decreasing the debt. Mr. G. B. Thorneycroft at once proposed a big tea-meeting at which a subscription list, headed largely by himself, followed in notable figures by Mr. John Perks, should be sent round the room to all present, and sent afterwards to those not there who were, nevertheless, able to give. The tea-meeting came off, and so did a considerable portion of the debt of Darlington Street Chapel. How much I have not learned, nor when the event took place, further than that it was to meet the expense of enlargement ; but the experiment was repeated thirty-one years ago with equal success. But not by the same men. Mr. Thorneycroft was no more, and his partner, Mr. John Perks, had followed him as far as the church, taking with himself the last of his family from Wesleyanism. His place was more than filled there by Mr. John Hartley, who headed the list with the handsome donation of £500, and a total of £967 9s. 6d. was collected.\*

This was not the only evidence in big figures that Mr.

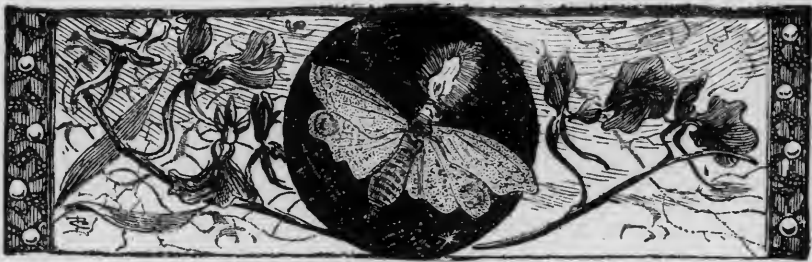
\* I have since been made acquainted with the fact that when Mr. Hartley headed, with £500, in 1853, the tea meeting subscriptions for reducing the debt on the chapel, Mr. John Perks followed immediately with £100, and when, ten years after, Mr. Hartley gave £1,000 towards the erection of Trinity Chapel, Mr. John Perks gave £200. It is true that Darlington Street Chapel ultimately lost all hold of Mr. John Perks, and that for a time he lost touch with the Wesleyans, and went to church, where he was honoured as his partner Mr. G. B. Thorneycroft had been ; but Mr. Hartley never lost hold of him, and when Trinity Chapel, in the Compton Road, offered him a pew he took it, and contracting a great friendship for the Rev. Mr. Brewster, one of the itinerants who there for three years was a stationed minister, found consolation from Wesleyan ministrations in his closing hours.

Hartley gave that when he left Wolverhampton Wesleyanism lost a good friend. He was one who had brought to the cause, as he brought to the town, position and talents. He was the son of Mr. John Hartley, of the firm of Chance & Hartley, the great glass manufacturers (now Chance Brothers), of Smethwick, then one of the most important, and soon to become the most colossal manufactory of the kind in the world. On the completion of his education at a private academy, he went into the office of his father's firm, and on his father's death, in 1833, he and his brother James, formerly M.P. for Sunderland, became partners in the firm; but both shortly afterwards withdrew their capital from the concern, Mr. James founding the Wear Glass Works, Sunderland, the next largest in England to those of Chance Brothers, and Mr. John joining, in 1841, the iron making and coal mining firm of G. B. Thorneycroft & Co., having two years previously married Emma, the second surviving daughter of the head of the firm. The dissolution of that firm was a great loss to the town, and the removal of Mr. Hartley to Tong Castle was an equal loss to its Wesleyan Methodism, for it was due to his generous gift of £1,000 and the site, and to his desire that Wesleyanism should be housed in a handsome building whose steepled beauty of architecture without and service within should bring Wesleyanism still nearer to the Church, and so far supply the wants of those who were disposed to leave the humbler edifices in which their forefathers worshipped, that Trinity Chapel was built on the Compton Road, forming an attraction to a suburb since rendered yet more attractive for architectural as well as sylvan beauty by the erection there of the New Grammar School. Mr. Hartley was born at Dumbarton, in Scotland, February 11th, 1813, and is therefore now close upon seventy-two years of age.\*

To the £467 9s. 6d. which Mr. Hartley's £500 brought

\* Mr. Hartley has since died.

in 1853, making up the total of £967 9s. 6d., was added £48 7s. 6d. by James Boulton Whitehouse, being at the rate of £1 which he had promised to add to every £20 contributed towards that effort to reduce the debt on Darlington Street Chapel. Had it been for himself, and not "for the Lord," he had bargained, he could have pleaded that the terms were £1 for every £20, that the odd £7 9s. 6d. did not count, and that the engagement would be fulfilled by the payment of £48; but when dealing "for the Lord" he put the Lord in his place, and was as exacting on behalf of Heaven, as he was when more of the earth, earthy, in his counting-house or warehouse doing business for himself. There, as became a shrewd man of business, he never gave what was asked for what he had to pay if he could get it for less; so on one of the annual Monday evenings that Dr. Robert Newton had preached an anniversary sermon in Darlington Street Chapel, he accosted the rev. orator with, "Well, doctor, you have done the work. Now, what is there to pay?" "Two guineas," replied the doctor. "Ah! that's what you ask; but what'll you take?" was the business-like rejoinder. The doctor, however, would "take" the two guineas, and, Mr. Whitehouse having satisfied his conscience by this attempt to get discount for the chapel, the twain could shake hands, each conscious of a strict discharge duty.



## CHAPTER X.

### WILL AND WORK FOR WESLEYANISM.

HE was a kindly, busy man, was James Boulton Whitehouse, who, besides devoting his worldly shrewdness to make the business side of the affairs of Darlington Street Chapel as profitable as his own, was ever helping with kindly word and hand those who were labouring to elevate the young and the old of the masses around them. He not only took an interest in Sunday Schools, being a special favourite with the big boys in that of Darlington Street Chapel, but for some time shared with others the oversight of the schools of the chapel; and though he was but a humble teacher and no preacher, the leaders and the local preachers of the circuit, upon whom the well-being and the progress of the circuit then so much depended, ever found in him a sympathising friend and a ready help in all their labours. He had always open house for them, and, as his house lay on the road between Wolverhampton and Tettenhall Wood, where the Wesleyans had a chapel and Sunday School—was, in fact nearer to Tettenhall Wood than to Darlington Street Chapel—teachers, preachers, and class-leaders found the old Horsehills farm and factory of Mr. Whitehouse a cheery and pleasant “half-way house.” Tettenhall Wood was not then the suburb of the palatial-like residence of local merchant princes it has since become,

nor the road to it the broad and pleasant thoroughfare, lighted throughout with gas, it is now. In fine weather, in open day, Nature, undisturbed by the bricklayer, presented to the wayfarer more rural charms ; but in rougher winter time, and when dark and blustering nights fell upon the earth, the way must have been weary indeed, and the Whitehouse dwelling a welcome shelter and a cheering house of call. Tettenhall Wood was then, too, as destitute of refinement and culture as it was of wealth and architecture, so that when in 1825, the year that Darlington Street Chapel was opened, the Wesleyans built a chapel there, all the preaching and the teaching had to come from Wolverhampton. A willing band of workers was soon organised, and week after week for many long years Sunday School teachers, local preachers, and class leaders would go out to these wilds of Tettenhall Wood and do their best to tame the roughness of the majority of its sparse population. These labourers of the Sunday generally took a cold dinner with them, tied up in a handkerchief or stowed away in a little canvas bag, like labourers of the week ; but their mission, their work, and the day forbade them seeking the comforts of an inn, and even had they sought them, they could scarcely have found them in the public-houses and beershops of those days. To such labourers the farm of Mr. Whitehouse was a welcome home indeed, and o'er "the cup," the praises of which the poet Cowper sang, they must have told many a tale of hardship and contumely, heaved many a sigh of disappointed hope, and prayed over many a discouragement, that won for them a sympathy which Mr. Whitehouse never forgot to his dying day, for his last will and testament was made largely in their favour.

The will is very characteristic of the shrewdness and business aptitude of the testator ; but still more so was a clause providing against the neglect and forgetfulness, not to add the cupidity, which have robbed the necessitous of so many old "doles" in the Church of England. He

directed his executors to "get a true and legible copy written of all that relates to Wesleyan Methodism contained in this will, and have the same framed and glazed, and hang the same in some conspicuous place in the preachers' vestry of Darlington Street Chapel aforesaid, and pay for the same out of the money to be paid for the benefit of the leaders and local preachers; the treasurers to whom the money is to be paid to renew the same from time to time as the same may become illegible, be destroyed, or taken away, and pay for the same as aforesaid."

The executors have carried out this part of their trust beyond the letter of their instructions, for they have had a number of copies printed in bold type, so that when the one framed and glazed, and hung up in the preachers' vestry of Darlington Street Chapel, becomes illegible, or is taken away or destroyed, another may be ready to take its place. The memory of the benefactions of Mr. Whitehouse is not, however, to be kept sacred to the preachers, but is published to the hearers of Darlington Street Chapel by a memorial tablet affixed to the wall which divides the main building from the preachers' vestry. The inscription upon the handsome marble is as follows:—

In Memory of

JAMES BOULTON WHITEHOUSE,

Late of Compton Road, formerly of Horsehills,

Who closed a life of Christian usefulness, October;: h, 1867,

Aged 73 years.

---

He bequeathed the following sums to religious and charitable institutions:—

The trust funds of this chapel, £477.

Monmore Green Chapel, £100.

Wesleyan Foreign Missionary Society, £277.

British and Foreign Bible Society, £100.

The relief of leaders and local preachers, £200.

To local charities, £332.

Also the sum of £707, invested by him in various securities, to form a relief fund for necessitous leaders and local preachers who have held office in connection with this place of worship for a period of seven years, and for the relief of their widows.

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“Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.”—PSALM xxxvii. 37.

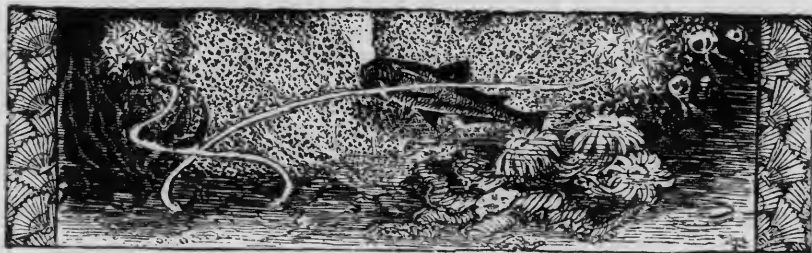
The help and impetus that Mr. Whitehouse left for Darlington Street Chapel produced all he could have hoped for. His scheme for decreasing the debt by combining his own resources with those of the members and of the Chapel Committee was the fruit of much experience in such matters. The first time, however, that such aid was sought, at his suggestion, from that committee, it was found that the trust deeds of the chapel had not been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Wesleyan Methodism. They had been drawn up to the best of the skill and ability of one of the best and most experienced lawyers of Wolverhampton, the late Mr. George Robinson, who, with a good-natured forgetfulness more common with him than common report gave him credit for, never troubled the trustees for his little bill. It was no reflection on his good lawyership that the deeds which Mr. Robinson drew up did not meet all the requirements which the subsequent experience of Wesleyan Methodists showed to be necessary, and that not only another lawyer's bill had to be met, but the costs of an action in Chancery had to be incurred before the old deeds could be replaced by new. Fortunately, the action was a “friendly” one, and the solicitor employed as “friendly,” too, and in six months of 1859-60 Mr. H. H. Fowler got the trustees in and out of Chancery, and out of all their difficulties, for a comparative *bagatelle* of costs out of pocket, showing how much more useful in a Wesleyan circuit are the Scribes than the Pharisees.

Mr. Whitehouse was pre-eminently, as far as his means



would allow, a typical representative of the prudence which accompanies generosity among many liberal givers in the Nonconforming and Dissenting Churches, and in this respect set an example that was steadily followed in the Wolverhampton Wesleyan Circuit by the more wealthy of his brethren,—the great material success, at least, of the circuit being largely due to the shrewd and calculating mind which accompanied the means which were given by the wealthier and more prominent men of the societies of the circuit—giving what was needed at the right time, and with a clear foresight to ulterior good. They gave most, too, to the needs immediately surrounding them, thus recognising that religion and charity should begin at home. The only exception to this rule that has come to my knowledge is that of the late Mr. Samuel Wilkes, brother of the late Mr. James Wilkes, whose large factory in St. Mark Street is now a part of the extensive agricultural and engineering works of Mr. Denton, also a Wesleyan. These two brothers were but a part of a numerous family, and both were as energetic and as striving as members of the Wesleyan body as they were as men of business, and both failed of their aim from lack of tempering their zeal with discretion. James sought to do great things as a preacher, and went to great lengths as a prayer leader ; shocking even the most determined upholders of things as they were during the days of the “ Fly Sheets ” by the terrors of the wrath he prayed might come upon their authors. Yet in action and conversation, whether at home or abroad, he was the most good-natured and cheery of men, with nothing alarming about him ; his best friends attributing much of his non-success to his being too easy. Samuel had no such vocal gift, and, assured by the success which attended his introduction of several novelties in the hardware trade of the district, and the discovery or adoption of a successful method of facing cast-iron with brass during the decade of 1830 to 1840, he astounded an annual meeting at Darlington Street Chapel in aid of the

Wesleyan Foreign Missions by causing to be read from the platform an announcement that he would every day, Sundays included, during the ensuing year, give a sovereign to those missions. According to the faith, strong in the Methodists of those if not of these days, that liberal contributions to religious works are loans to Heaven, which will be repaid with manifold cent. per cent. interest, the undertaking was, from a business point of view, a good investment. Good men of business among the Wesleyans of the circuit, however, shook their heads at it, and thought that the enterprising manufacturer and factor of Cleveland Street was carrying faith too far. Nevertheless, Samuel Wilkes carried out his promise, and had such faith in the process that at the next annual meeting he sent an undertaking up to the platform that he would, on every one of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the succeeding year, give seven sovereigns in aid of Wesleyan Foreign Missions. The platform thought this was too much of a good thing, kindly withheld the publication of the offer, and privately counselled the zealous Samuel to be sure that he had before he gave ; and not only the seven times three hundred and sixty-five sovereigns were not given, but ere long the would-be donor went from Wolverhampton in search of fortune elsewhere, giving up his business to Mr. Cooke, in whose hands it so grew that he now carries it on in extensive new premises he built for the purpose in the Cleveland Road.



## CHAPTER XI.

FROM DARLINGTON STREET TO GOSPEL END.

NONCONFORMISTS' chapels in general, and Wesleyan chapels in particular, by no means overload their walls with monumental inscriptions to the worth of the departed who once worshipped within the four corners of the edifice. One can nowhere in the "Black Country" count more than one for each generation that has passed away, and many a Dissenting place of worship is utterly bare of such memorials. This is not because such worthies are scarce among them, or that relatives or members are ungrateful for what the dead did while living, or what they left when they died ; but because the Nonconformist Churches seem to have set their faces against that which rather pleases inheritors than truthfully honours those from whom they inherit, and because they wish to emphasise the teaching to the living that faith, hope, and charity must seek their reward in heaven rather than on the walls of church or chapel. Only then, when some one, by labour and love more than by material means, has helped to build up their "cause," and specially endeared him or herself to the congregation from the midst of which he is removed by death, is the silence of the grave broken and the walls of the chapel set aglowing with a record of the virtues of the departed. Hence, in addition to that to Mr. Whitehouse,

there is but one other memorial tablet on the walls of Darlington Street Chapel. It is—

To the Glory of God,  
And in Loving Remembrance of  
ELEANOR THORNEYCROFT,  
Of Chapel House, Wolverhampton.  
Born March 28th, 1795 ; Died January 5th, 1874.

---

Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with her God,  
She served her own generation ;  
And then fell on sleep in sure and certain hope  
Of the Resurrection to Eternal Life, through her Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to the valuable material and spiritual aid she gave to the development of Wesleyanism in the circuit, of which I shall hereafter give some few instances, what would most commend the good lady to the affectionate memory of the Darlington Street congregation was the fidelity with which she clung to Wesleyanism long after it had loosened its hold on the greater number of the Thorneycroft family, who all, with one or two exceptions, more than followed the example of the head of the family by wholly and solely identifying their religious life with that of the Church. She was "a Wesleyan of the old-fashioned sort"—a loving mother, a faithful wife, a true woman, who gave what heart and time the claims of home duty and of domestic affection left her to the good of others and the furtherance of the cause of Him in Whom she trusted, her anxiety for the increase of believers and the multiplying of places of worship increasing, as we shall see, with the decrease of her life.

As a general rule the men and the means that contributed to the growth of the Wolverhampton Wesleyan Circuit were separate, if not distinct—the means but supplementing the men and providing money to erect and maintain the buildings for worship by those whom the men brought out of

the world into the Church. In this work the earlier local preachers were most conspicuous. They not only supplied pulpits which there were no means of supplying by salaried ministers, but every pulpit now supplied by either local or itinerant preachers was made by local preachers. How they were made there is a local preacher yet alive to tell. He began preaching in 1820, and he is preaching still—Mr. William Hackett, of Bilston. He joined the Bilston Society of Wesleyan Methodists seventy years ago, and is now its most honoured and esteemed, as well as its oldest, member. He was apprenticed to the first printer that ever set up type in Bilston, but who was not what his apprentice became,—a typical Methodist of the very old school. He has by him "the Plans" since 1834. What the Methodists call "Plans" are issued in each circuit quarterly, and give a list of the appointments, Sunday and week-day, of every preacher to every place of worship within the circuit. Among some Methodist bodies the tastes of preachers and congregations in a circuit are consulted by delegates to a Plan Committee; but both are at the mercy of the superintendents among the Wesleyans, and those quasi-episcopal authorities have little opportunity of studying either. Some years before 1804 the circuit that contained Wolverhampton was called Dudley, and embraced an exceedingly wide circle that took in parts of three counties. In that year Wolverhampton became the head of a lesser circuit, with three chapels in it—Noah's Ark, Bilston, and Can Lane, Coseley, to which there was soon after added the chapel in Hell Lane that Williams the local preacher was so instrumental in building. But there were other places where there was preaching in houses and cottages. We have already seen in the course of these narratives how Noah's Ark and Bilston Chapels arose out of preaching in cottages and private houses, and the history of Hell Lane tells how the fact of a local preacher exhorting and preaching indoors and out of doors among his neighbours leads to the build-

ing of a chapel in the place. Mr. Hackett's long career supplies more than one instance of how in olden times a local preacher, with his heart in the work given him "on the Plan," but not content with it, fixes upon an unvisited and unconverted spot in the circuit, and goes forth with such help as he can find, and works it up into the locality of a society and a chapel. The spot in question is Gospel End, so called, no doubt, because in very olden times it was visited once a year by priest or parson and parochial officials to mark the bounds or ends of the parish by their reading a portion of the Gospel. It is separated from Penn by Penn Common, and lies high and snug and green between Baggeridge Wood and the Sedgley hills, there being a road through the rocks on to Sedgley Green. From that Green to Bilston is a long, weary, and, at night, a weird walk enough. Through that rock one day Mr. Hackett penetrated, and finding that the very small farmers, farm labourers, nailers, miners, and here and there ironworkers, their wives, and children, had no more of the Gospel than was to be found in the name of the place, resolved to win it to Wesleyanism. He persuaded a young man to aid him in the task, and each, with a cold dinner tied up in a handkerchief in one hand, and a bundle of tracts in the other, trudged to the scene of their labours, and, when weary of going from door to door leaving tracts where there was any one who could read, and plenty of words of hope and warning at every house, they betook themselves to the wood, and, with the green grass for table and tablecloth, ate with thankfulness their frugal meal, their drink being from the rill that ran murmuring at their feet. Fatigue vanished with a little rest, perhaps a little slumber, taken at length upon the bed Nature had made beneath the green trees, and these companions in arms went to work again, and then home in time for chapel in the evening. More often Hackett would have to set forth from Gospel End in this, that, or the other direction, to himself preach the Gospel,

and thence trudge home, a wearier distance still. The work thus commenced was followed up Sunday after Sunday until a footing was gained in a roomy cottage, and there a school was started for children. The children were a road to the hearts of the mothers, who could move the fathers ; so it soon came that the school was followed by preaching to the parents, Hackett finding no difficulty in getting some one to go with him to share his labours, or to go alone or with others, when he was himself "planned" elsewhere. The seed thus sown by these humble, toiling, unpaid labourers ripened to the harvest. Men and women were converted, hungering and thirsting for the spiritual food these men brought them. Soon there was a class and a society, and Gospel End "came upon the Plan," and all the local preachers in their turn found they had "an appointment" to take there every now and then, and took it willingly, no matter how far it was away from home and family on the day of rest.

For years the chapel was only a room, and the only plea for a pulpit the back of a chair ; but at length the now existing little chapel was raised and opened in 1846, at the cost of £130, and the cause was afterwards strengthened by a local preacher, in the person of Mr. William Millington, ironmaster, taking up his residence at the End. He did not start in life as an ironmaster, but as an ironworker, and, singular to state, began life poorly at Gospel, or, as it is now called, Wednesbury, Oak, to finish it thus wealthily at Gospel End. He needed the consolation which he had, in fact, of having had the Gospel at both ends of active life, for infirmities, among which an affection of the lungs was the chief, stole upon him, so that he could not always go to hear a sermon, and could very rarely go to preach one ; but when he did, O ! most rare and exceptional of local preachers, he could husband strength of limb and lung by going in his carriage !

Any one who knows anything of crossing Penn Common

on a winter's night, with pelting rain or blinding snow, can easily understand how much many a poor "local" from even Wolverhampton, much more some other end of the circuit, proceeding to or from his "appointment" at Gospel End, wished, at such a time and in such weather, the possession of such a carriage could be the rule, and not the solitary exception, among Wolverhampton Circuit local preachers. If anything could compensate for the inequality, it was the anticipation of, or the reflection upon, the kindly, good, and courteous "entertainment" always provided by Mrs. Millington for the preachers. She had often to excuse the confinement of her husband to his chamber; but with cheery and shrewd annotations on topics in general, and Wesleyanism in particular, there was no lack of conversation at the dinner table; and though her husband never smoked, and the fumes of tobacco were intolerable to his lungs, yet if the preacher smoked he found that guests and husband were alike cared for in this particular. The clean and cosy kitchen was the smoke room, because its partial disconnection from the main building prevented the smoke travelling to the inconvenience of the owner; while the maid, who shared her mistress's respect for the preachers, was sure to give all things an extra polish before going off to Sunday School, and surrendering her domain for the next ninety minutes to the rule of preacher and pipe. The respect of that mistress for preachers, though they were "local," was so great that she was anxious that they should all aspire, like the itinerants, to the same ecclesiastical cut and trim; and one Sunday afternoon the following brief colloquy took place in that kitchen, while the preacher of the Gospel at Gospel End for the day being (it was not Mr. Hackett\*) was filling the bowl of a fine, slim, and tapering Broseley from a neat casket of aromatic fine-cut tobacco Mrs. Millington had provided for his delectation and delight.

\* It was Mr. Pratt himself.



Said Mrs. Millington, "Why do you not wear something to distinguish yourself as a preacher?"

The Preacher: "I am afraid that the only true method for a preacher to distinguish himself is by his sermons. I will do my best to set the fashion to-night, but I am afraid that it will be a bad one that no other preacher ought to follow."

Mrs. Millington: "'That's all very well; but I think every preacher and minister ought at least to wear a white tie or white neckcloth."

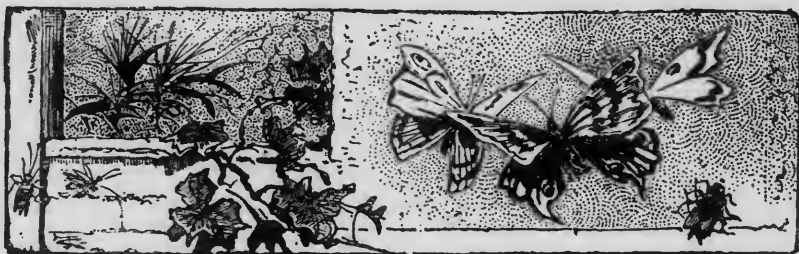
Preacher: "Why, Ma'am?"

Mrs. Millington: "Why, to distinguish himself from other men who are not preachers, to be sure."

Preacher: "I am sorry to disagree with you; because my experience tells me that white tie or neckcloth involves a difference that scarcely carries a distinction, being worn alike by waiters, clergymen, and stable helps. I was the other night at a public dinner, and, anxious to add something vegetable to the tempting viand upon my plate, I turned round and saw at the back of the chair one whom I took, from his tie and the way he tied it, for a waiter, and I said to him, I am afraid not with the patience and humility of 'grace before meat,' 'My good fellow, do bring me some potatoes.' He looked at me, not as one Christian man should look at another, and turned away, not in search of my coveted potatoes, but in search of a waiter to fetch him a chair and make him a place at the table, he being, as my right-hand neighbour informed me, a late arrival in the person of the latest new curate of the parish."

Mrs. Millington: "O, nonsense now, you know I am right."

The preacher could only bow acquiescence as the good lady left him in the clouds of his own making.



## CHAPTER XII.

### WESLEYAN RURAL MISSIONING.

HAPPY the local preacher who met no greater disappointment in filling his appointment than the absence of tobacco, if he were given to smoking, after dinner. He would be sure to be given to eating, and it has so chanced that owing to misunderstanding or ill-arrangement no one has been appointed to "entertain the preacher," as it is called, and that worthy, very hungry from a long walk, followed by ninety minutes' exercise in the pulpit, has had the melancholy dissatisfaction of seeing his congregation hastening hungrily away, leaving him famishing behind. The worst part of the business would be that, as a rule, the local preacher "planned" far away from home finds himself, as a rule, put down on the Plan for evening as well as morning service, so that, if compelled to return home for his dinner, he must come back for the evening service ; and he would be a sorry local preacher indeed who would withhold the distribution of the spiritual food he had got in store, because some one among those whom it was his mission to feed with such food had failed to provide him with a dinner. He would do his best to meet both wants ; would, perhaps, know some house in the neighbourhood or in some place between that of his appointment and his home, to which he could invite himself. One preacher

who was not so fortunate took a mild and novel way of admonishing his hearers that if the local preacher were not a "labourer" who is "worthy of his hire," yet, like every other labourer, he requires dinner. The next time he was planned to preach to the people who in his instance had previously lost sight of that elementary fact, he put up some bread and meat in a bag, and the first thing he did when he got into the pulpit was to hang the bag upon a nail at the back of the pulpit in full view of the puzzled congregation. The prayers said, the lessons read and the hymns sung, the sermon commenced, and then the use of the bag as a witness of the truth developed, and the congregation marvelled at the ingenuity with which the preacher made things carnal minister to things spiritual, and added to a forcible discourse on a moot point in divinity a lesson in hospitality which they never forgot. At every point and period of his discourse he exclaimed, "It is true," and turning in the pulpit and pointing to the back thereof, added solemnly, "As true, my dear and beloved brethren, as it is that my dinner is in this bag."

Very rarely, however, such lessons had or have to be taught, for, as a rule, with very few exceptions, the poorest member is proud to do his best for the preacher, and esteems it somewhat of an honour to be allowed to entertain him. The good wife is sure to be busier than ever on the Saturday previous, making even the deal table aglow with whitened purity, while the great eight-day hall clock in the corner, and the high mahogany chest of drawers, with its feet, like Cinderella, in glass slippers, to keep them out of the wet when the floor is "swilled," have been rubbed with English hands until they dazzle with a brilliancy that would make French polish ashamed of itself. The children have on their best pinafores, and are on their best behaviour, and are looking into the preacher's face with an awe conditioned by curiosity, wondering what he will think of the fowl and of the "goodies" worked up—wondrously worked

—into an open tart, when he sees them brought in from the kitchen called “brewhouse” and laid upon the table. What is their wonder if the honoured guest, as one good minister and another equally good local preacher that I have heard of, knowing how the children have been schooled to expect no fowl, but to be content with a little of the spare-rib of pork that is served on a side-dish to a pile of potatoes luxuriant in gravy, cheerily exclaims, “Now, mother, I’ll carve the fowl,” and divides no small part of it among the little ones, despite the assurance of the still not unpleased mother that fowls were for preachers and not for “childern !”

But labourers’ wages do not generally run the length of poultry for dinner, and the town-bred stomach of some sedentarily employed preacher would need all the appetite that his long walk into the country could put into his stomach to enable him to take kindly to the strong food that might be placed before him. Well for him if he put not on an appearance so much above the dinner prepared as to lose it, as once upon a time did one aspiring young “local.” He had been just put upon the Plan “on trial.” That is to say, his name appearing beneath that heading signified that for the next twelve months he would have occasional appointments, and then if he proved “acceptable” to the congregations in the circuit, and satisfactorily passed an examination by the superintendent before the local preachers’ meeting, he would be placed “on full Plan” above the dividing salt of that heading. He was anxious to shine as a preacher, and mistaking his hat for his head, bought a new silk capital covering that made up in glossy surface for whatever it might lack in enduring substance. To this he added an equally polished flossed and flowered silken enwrapper of his neck, setting off, as he conceived to great advantage, a somewhat pretentious waistcoat. It was a distant and a poor little congregation before which he preached his maiden sermon. He could eat nothing for hours before he began ; he could have amply atoned for

such remissness when he had done, but no one invited him to dinner. He saw the congregation file out at the little chapel door, until only an old and timid lady stood irresolutely on the threshold. She half turned back, as though she would speak, but apparently lost courage and hurried away. He felt that that powerful sermon of his had affected even "a mother in Israel," and he tried to feel humbly thankful as he, too, took his departure, caressing his silk hat, and feeling whether the knot of his tie was at the right point of the compass of fashion beneath his chin. But there was no dinner there, and by the time he found one at home he was full of indignation, a portion of which he imparted as soon as opportunity offered to the oldest preacher on the Plan. That worthy was sure there was some mistake, and promised to clear the matter up the first time he was "appointed" to the peccant place. That time soon came. He was assured that all due preparation had been made for the entertainment of the younger brother, and Mrs. M. had promised to take him home to dinner. Asked why she did not keep her promise, she pleaded she was but a poor widow. Though poor, she had put herself to out-of-the-way charges to prepare a dinner for the preacher; but when she considered how humble the meal was after all her charges and her pains, and saw the fashion and form of the preacher, she had not the courage to ask him to partake of her modest meal, and returned home alone, and rather ashamed of herself. When that old preacher told his younger collaborateur the story, he told it in such a way that that young gentleman felt rather ashamed of himself.

But it is time to return to Mr. William Hackett. Being so successful at Gospel End, he went on to Wombourn, but only a little Wesleyan candle could be set up there, and, after much flickering, it went out, the Independents alone succeeding in becoming shining lights in those parts. An attempt on Penn had even a lesser semblance of success, and all along the line of their efforts to plant Wesleyanism

in rural ground where it had never grown before Mr. Hackett and his contemporary local preachers failed. We have seen how, after many years, their labours came to nought at Tettenhall; and they went yet further on that road and fared worse. There was preaching for a time at Kingswood, on the road to Codsall, but only for a short time; and Codsall never came even to the proportions of Tettenhall. Mr. Hackett went there, after other locals had been, in 1823, and was sent back by the constable, he having no licence to preach. Nothing daunted, he got a licence from the Rev. Mr. Leigh, who was justice of the peace as well as perpetual curate at Bilston, and armed with this he, the next time he was planned at Codsall, put it into his pocket. He knew it would be no use in that receptacle, so he wisely took his brother local, Mr. Riley, with him, to serve it like a warrant on any one disposed to violence, and when Riley's stalwart frame towered over the assembled multitude, and in majestic tone he read from the document, "In the name of his sacred Majesty King George the Third," there was such an air of Church and State around the whole business that Mr. Hackett was listened to with something akin to admiring awe, and the Wesleyans so far grew in favour that when the Primitive Methodist Chapel fell into the hands of a butcher, the Wesleyans hired the place of the butcher, and kept it open for many years. But it always remained a primitive place, and the local preachers had for many years an anxious time of it. They had to keep one eye on their sermon, and the other on the wicks of the candles that lighted the pulpit desk. Then spectacles that are an aid to the reading of sacred writ, are apt to misguide the hand armed with a pair of snuffers in the direction of a tallow candle. Add nervousness to the fingers from a sense of the momentousness of the occasion, and out goes the light, and the giggle that goes round the audience is apt to untimely conclude the "few closing remarks" into which the preacher has to gather and bring to bear all his

rhetorical forces. Then, too, many of the congregation had dogs and children at home. Mothers wished to come to chapel in the evening, and the preachers wished them to be there. They could not leave the babies at home, and the dogs would not stop there, but insisted upon following the mothers and the babies, producing music not anticipated by the Methodist Tune Book. Fancy Mr. Hackett going home all the way to Bilston in the dark, lucky if rain, hail, or snow was not added, after such an evening service of sore discouragement, yet coming resolutely again every time he was planned ; and then judge the pertinacity of the many men like him who thus laboured to establish Wesleyanism in such rural parts as Codsall. The attempt, though persevered in until within a very few years ago, failed. Not only was there failure to build a Wesleyan chapel, but failure of local ability to pay rent for the place owned once by the Primitives, and Codsall was at last given up in despair. An attempt to establish the cause at Shareshill, nearly half a century ago, by local preachers of the Wolverhampton Circuit was not long persevered in ; and though they took a chapel on wheels to Gaily for the conversion of the navigators at work there in 1846, and the labourers ever labouring there, when the navigators went the chapel on wheels went, and left no other meeting place for Wesleyans behind. But who will assert that the "Locals" who preached in it did not clear the way in that once remote part of the once extensive parish of Wolverhampton for the now ecclesiastical district of Gaily-cum-Hatherton, its church, its vicar, and the religious life and better being of which they are the centre ?

The only decidedly rural successes of the Wolverhampton Wesleyans have been Coven and Brewood, the latter an offshoot of the former. Yet town, trade, and manufactures had much to do with the success of the cause in the former in the persons of the Smith family, and lockmaking may have been a key to the opening of Brewood to Methodist

success. The eldest of the Smiths was at Coven, as a locksmith. He prospered, and took care that Wesleyanism should prosper too. He added farming to lockmaking, and prospered in that ; but he and his son, and his son's son, had ever a greater taste for trade than tilling and perhaps the desire to make as good a figure in the world as several in the neighbouring town who had once been no better off than the Smith of old, led them into town-like speculations that eventually swallowed up so much of what they got of the country. Grandfather Smith kept to lockmaking, built a goodly warehouse, and took care that there should be a large room beneath for Sunday preaching and weekday prayer and class meetings. The son inherited both, and not only kept up the preaching, but himself became a well-known and acceptable local preacher, not only in the Wolverhampton Circuit, but in the new circuits on the Coven side of it, which came in course of time to diminish its limits in that direction. At one time he showed signs of rebellion and change, going after the Primitives to Codsall, but eventually settled down among the faithful remnant his father left to his care, and was active in carrying the Gospel, as it is presented by the Wesleyans, to his neighbours at Brewood. The cause at Coven outgrew in many ways the accommodation provided under the Smiths' warehouse, and John Smith, the preacher, volunteered, as a site for a chapel, a goodly strip of the freehold of the long, large garden at the back of the house his father had built for himself. The site was accepted, and upon it there was built, in 1839, out of the Wesleyan Centenary Fund, a neat little chapel at a cost of £340. At Brewood, however, John Smith and the other locals sent to his help had to labour in a cottage, which eventually expanded into something like a schoolroom, for nearly thirty years after that, no Wesleyan chapel being built there until 1868. It was a small one then ; but nine years afterwards it was enlarged, and cost in the whole £535.



Thus labouring and thus prospering alike in matters material and spiritual, building on the old foundations his father had laid in Coven before him, and raising goodly structures thereon, John Smith was for years a happy man ; and his house was a hospitable home for the preachers. They needed it. Coven and Brewood were a long call from any of their homes, and they who had to travel from Bilston, or the very opposite side of the circuit, were thankful to know they had a brother at Coven so capable and so willing to lighten their burdens and cheer their labours. In time the railway came to bring them back from Codsall ; but there was no such good fortune for their appointment at Coven or Brewood. They must tramp to and fro, and when the same preacher had to take the two places, Coven morning and evening, Brewood in the afternoon, he found it a heavy day's work. It was some consolation in wet weather to know that there would be no need to pass at once into the pulpit with damp clothing, for the preacher had ever by hospitable law to pass to the chapel through Mr. Smith's house and garden, and there would be awaiting him warm shoes and stockings, and anything dry needful to replace wet garments, and he could, if he liked, pass the night comfortably beneath the Smith roof, and come home easily in the morning. Few local preachers, however, could afford that luxury, daily work requiring early attendance on the Monday morning. It was pleasanter when a second preacher went out to evening service to Coven, for then there was cheery talk round the tea and supper table, and company home.

It would have been well, perhaps, for John Smith, if he had applied the practical wisdom he showed in theology more effectively to his worldly business, and kept tight hold of the trade by which his father had made his money, and not have worked for a vehicle to fortune more recently put on the road—the steam-engine. But his son had learnt the business of steam-engine making, was a clever hand at the

craft, and it seemed as though everything was to be done by steam. So the lock works became engineering works, and turned out good engines ; but by the time the materials were got to Coven from, and the engines sent to, the centre of trade and commerce and the *dépôt* of raw material in Wolverhampton and Birmingham, there was so much to pay for transport that Coven failed to compete successfully in the market, and when advancing years and failing health kept John Smith by the fireside, he had to smoke more than ever and draw largely on his practical and utilitarian theology to take a cheerful view of human life, and his relation to it. That view, however, never deserted him, and when one Sunday afternoon he was weary for awhile of the former, he nearly startled the pipe out of the hand of the preacher for the day, by exclaiming, "Brother, I am sure the Lord does not intend me to do much more preaching." "Why?" was the interrogative exclamation. "Why! Because if He did He would have left me a better pair of legs to take me to the pulpit, and enable me to stand in it when I got there."

What there was of theology in his son was equally practical. The good vicar of Coven was as active as liberal in the parish, and once invited his Methodist parishioners to join in public prayer meeting. The son went, among others, and told his father on his return how surprised the vicar was at hearing the readiness with which the Methodist offered up prayer, and expressed an opinion that it would be well if the Universities gave intending clergymen lessons in extempore prayer. "And what did you say?" asked Smith *père* of his son. "I simply said I thought it would." "But what did you think?" "I thought the best way to teach them would be to throw them into the river. When a man feels he is lost, he is sure to call out for somebody to save him."

There spoke out from the mouth of the third generation of the Smiths, of Coven, the plain, practical issue of the

Wesleyanism all three loved. Save gentle sisters, all the voices of those generations are hushed, and Smiths' hearth and chapel walls hear them no more. But they have left good work behind, at which others like them still toil.

When their bounds reached so far, William Hackett and his brother preachers of the Wolverhampton Circuit went to Albrighton, and sought to rouse its then rural sloth, but failed. Times have mended since, and that rural life, all the better for that of the town the railway has grafted upon it, has very recently added a Wesleyan chapel, the property of another circuit, to its buildings. They also tried Neachells about the year 1842, but found it advisable to confine their energies to Wednesfield and Wednesfield Heath, where growing manufactures were more and more casting out the purely agricultural, and so bringing the local preaching work there under the head of "Wesleyan Town Missioning," of which I shall treat in my next chapter.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### WESLEYAN TOWN MISSIONING.

WE have seen how, at the two opposite sides of the circuit, on the green fringe of that part of "the old Black Country" of which Wolverhampton forms somewhat of a centre, two systems of missioning a place or a neighbourhood prevailed—one where a local preacher and his brethren took Wesleyanism to where no Wesleyan was to be found, and, by systematic visits and persevering labour, made as many Wesleyans as would fill a chapel, and then left them to grow, as at Gospel End; and another as at Coven, where they went to the help of some solitary Wesleyan, making a church of his house until the congregation grew too large to find house room there, and a chapel had to be built. It was in the latter way that the earlier of the town-like Wesleyan chapels built themselves up around the mother chapel in Darlington Street. The earliest was that at Wednesfield. There was a "cause" there very early in the century, so early that, soon after Mr. Hackett joined the Wesleyan Society of Bilston seventy-four years ago, he, before he entered upon his now sixty-four years of local preaching, used to go there to assist in conducting prayer meetings. He remembers going for that purpose with another on the Tuesday night of a Wednesfield Wake, and finding that the landlord of the room in which the Wes-

leyans met for services and prayer meetings, making the most of the opportunity for turning an honest, if not a pious penny, had let it to a Punch and Judy show, and there, for that night at least, the devil, so far as diabolical Punch would let him, had it all his own way. Whether those who went to pray stopped to laugh I know not, but even a good Wesleyan might be none the worse for a broad grin at "Punch and Judy, and Punch's triumph over the evil one."

As far as the memory of the oldest Wesleyans of the neighbourhood go, they first met at Wednesfield in the parlour of John Lane, who resided opposite the church; and when that grew too small for them, they removed to Lanes's Hall, which, shorn of its old dignity, had, in its main portions, been divided into several dwellings, the Wesleyans finding meeting and school room over some stabling. In this new meeting place they were still topographically near the church, and in religious life and intercourse came still nearer to it—much nearer than early Wesleyans in general were permitted to be by local church authorities. But the then incumbent, the Rev. Mr. Clare, who came to such a tragic end at Wolverhampton, took a liking to them, and when he heard that the parish clerk had one Sunday afternoon set the bells agoing to drown the voice of a Wesleyan "local," who, to the best of the clerk's intolerant belief, was desecrating the churchyard wall by making it a sounding board for his open-air pulpit, he commanded the bigot not to so offend again.

The Wesleyans of Wednesfield were not ungrateful to their parish church and its minister, for they not only went to church themselves on Sunday mornings, but marched the children of their Sunday Schools thither. Teachers as well as children were only "babes in grace," and required so much nursing that Mr. John Bate, of Bilston, used to go over every Sunday for years to superintend their meetings and education, often taking with him the then youthful

Hackett, who grew up to be a very popular preacher with the Wednesfield Wesleyans. Several veterans there have great recollections too of the preaching services rendered them by two other Bilston locals, of the several names of Winsor and Hickman. Rich and grateful Wesleyan memories still cluster round the name of Griffiths, especially the mother and father of the Wesleyans of that ilk, at Wednesfield or Heath Town; and Mrs. Squire, of Neachells, and her sister, Mrs. Hope, of Wednesfield, are kindly remembered, while the Wesleyanism of those parts owes much, as we shall shortly see, to the Ecclestones.

Wesleyanism at Wednesfield seems to have led a comparatively uneventful life until the great event of its being, the building of the chapel. The interference with the parish clerk by the parish minister seems to have prevented anything approaching persecution. Occasionally a drunken man or a rough youth would stray to meeting, and intensify "Amen" or spoil the singing by inappropriate chorus; but Wesleyans of old cared for none of those things, and went on their way rejoicing until they found themselves in their present roomy chapel the same year that Darlington Street Chapel was opened. Unhappily, after a few years, the cause ceased to grow as of old; in fact, sometimes took to growing downwards, and then would spring up again, so that the chapel remains rather roomy to this day. There are signs, I am told, of better things now, and the Sunday School, ever the popular institute of the structure, is reviving its great usefulness. The total cost of Wednesfield Chapel was £1,150.

Joseph Eccleston, trap maker, removed in 1837 from Wednesfield to what is now known as Heath Town, but then was called Wednesfield Heath. He found no Wesleyans or Wesleyanism there, so, like a good Wesleyan, he set about making both, and was no sooner settled in a house on the right hand side of that part of the Prestwood Road which now bears the name of Church Street than he

opened it for Sunday afternoon and evening service, and a weekly class meeting. The earlier congregations were meagre enough. The first counted but six members, and four of them were Ecclestons. Thomas Hencher, of Wolverhampton, was its first leader, and was diligent alike in the financial and spiritual work of the Connexion, for it is no insignificant fact in the history of these small beginnings of the greater ramifications of this great Wesleyan movement that they who thus voluntarily led the way not only subjected themselves to all its contumely and perils to "mind, body, and estate," but had to pay weekly and quarterly toll levied upon them by those in whose cause they fought at their own charges. The Ecclestons had to find their own house-church, bring and keep together its congregation, and directly they formed themselves into a class of the Connexion of Wesleyan Societies, a stated weekly and quarterly contribution had to be paid for each member; so that the old Wesleyan woman might be pardoned for having, when asked, "What is Wesleyanism?" bluntly replied, "A penny a week, and a shilling a quarter!"

It was not only the Ecclestons who paid as well as worked, and paid as willingly as they worked, but he to whom they paid paid and worked too, for the leader not only had to come from and return to Wolverhampton weekly, and give of his brain and his heart, as well of his time, to the work of leading his class and guiding its members, but he must himself contribute of his means, and make up sometimes for the monetary deficiencies of his class. From highest to lowest there was self-sacrifice, for the salaried ministers who were the ultimate recipients of the pence and shillings were so poorly paid as to forbid the suggestion that pecuniary gain was the motive to the adoption of the career upon which they had entered.

Such self-sacrifice and self-denying labour had their legitimate and logical result in the rapid progress of the cause at Wednesfield Heath. The class grew and formed

classes, and the Eccleston house became too small for a chapel. There were some old stables standing on an eligible plot of land at the other side of the street, and, seeing that the stables might be converted, at a small outlay, into a decent meeting room, the enterprising little society, with the help of wealthier brethren at Wolverhampton, purchased the lot, and in the year 1838 the apology for a chapel thus made was opened by the Rev. W. Bird, William Eccleston, the son of Joseph, being the first chapel steward. Mr. Samuel Griffiths, coming from Wednesfield to the Heath with his wife, a sister of Mr. Hope, was no small gain to the cause, around which, as the "Heath" grew into a "town," the Howells, the Summerhills, and other pillars of the rising Wesleyan Church clustered. Growth begat growth. The old stables came down, and something more like a chapel went up, which in 1860 was replaced by the present handsome structure on the main road at an ultimate cost, with alterations and embellishments, of very nearly £2,000. The old chapel in Church Street has become a warehouse for iron, having been sold for £100, though from first to last it cost the society some £350.

We will now turn to the other side of Wolverhampton.

The Fighting Cocks is still the name of a neighbourhood, as well as the sign of a large public-house situated on and about that part of the Dudley Road where a turnpike gate very recently marked the bounds there between Wolverhampton and Sedgley, and was known as the Fighting Cocks gate. The name tells of the time when the game of fighting cocks was the principal pastime of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, in the two parishes, a pastime exceeded in its attraction only by that of the bull-ring or the rarer bear-bait; and here the lovers of "the sport" were wont to congregate, and brutalise themselves by training some of the brute creation to be more brutal, and to make that which was intended by Nature to be but a part, and that even the lower part, the whole of animal being.



Nature had endowed such birds and brutes with courage, skill, and weapons for defence, that they might, as far as possible, peacefully pursue the way of life for which they were created, and play effectively and usefully their part in general being. Intelligence in man perverted this arrangement, and made of conservation destruction. Such perversion was more destructive to man than to the animal, for he must needs reduce himself morally to less than the animal before he could use his intelligence to degrade it. Hence, just in proportion as the people have been led to abandon such once boasted "popular pastimes," have they risen in the scale of intellectual and moral being. Theology then but confirmed the decision that barest and merest philosophy came to, when it denounced such sports as a sin and a shame; for if, as some Christian scholars say, the word "sin" be derived from an old Hebrew term signifying to miss one's aim, then the aim and purpose of man to be above the brute and raise himself and the world beneath him yet higher, was shamefully marred by such proceedings. It is easy and safe to write and urge this now when even devotion to horse-racing in Wolverhampton is only to be found in idle bipeds waiting on luck at street corners, and when cockfighters scuttle like rats to holes, in dread of a policeman, terrible as terrier, but it was different in the days when "The Fighting Cocks" was in its glory. It took a bold Christian then to stand the centre of attraction where these four roads meet, to denounce all such fighting as a sin and a shame. He took his life in his hand who did it. Yet Wesleyan local preachers were found to do it, and, succeeding so far in their work as to find a roomy cottage tenanted by a man bold enough to lend it for such a purpose, they opened Sunday services there, and came in time to find little other opposition than students of the old and famous Roman Catholic Seminary of Sedgley Park, anxious to plume their young theological wings, would sometimes make. This was some years before Darlington

Street Chapel was opened, and the cottage was one of a few old buildings on the Goldthorne Hill Road, and nearly opposite the Fighting Cocks Inn. By 1829 the Fighting Cocks Society had crossed the Dudley Road, and progressed so far down the left-hand side of Parkfield Road on the way to Ettingshall as to take up its home in the house occupied there by Mr. Joseph Dainty, a charter-master or butty collier. The old roomy cottage stands there still, and there every Sunday Mr. Hackett, Mr. W. Bayliss, old Mr. Tyrer, and the still older Mr. Riley, or some other local preacher "on the Plan" of the time being, preached. The four I have named were the great favourites as preachers, but for hard work outside the pulpit in connection with the place their two local brethren, Mr. Edward Beatie and Mr. Homer, were the more active, taking up as they did the class and house-to-house missioning work of Mr. Edward Bowder, the first class leader at "The Fighting Cocks," as the place was named on the Plan. They were succeeded in their arduous work by Mr. Tunncliffe, the famous "local" of the days of Noah's Ark, who afterwards went to Birmingham to fill the post of home missionary there. The classes met at eight o'clock on Sunday morning, and the services were confined to the evening, commencing at six o'clock. The travelling preacher conducted service once a month on a Thursday evening, some of the more energetic of the society beating up the neighbourhood to increase the number of his hearers.

For such a church in a house there was often a large congregation, and a room behind was frequently added to the large general room in which the services were held, some fifty or sixty worshippers being thus provided for, while in summer the front door would be left open, and a score or two additional around it would still further increase the number of auditors. Joseph Dainty's love of Methodism was fully shared by his wife, and by many of his children; and not only the preachers, as well itinerant as local, but

other workers in the cause were ever glad to lend a hand to advance it at "The Fighting Cocks."

Between the Fighting Cocks and Church Lane, at the top of Snowhill, there were very few houses until Mr. Derry, having made much money with the bricks he made for other people, made more bricks for himself, built houses with them, and so formed the street which goes by his name to this day. That led up into Green Lane, but the greenness was even then being smothered by spoil banks and furnace smoke, and the many little houses there and thereabouts had anything but a rural look, and too many of their inhabitants were far removed from a state of pastoral simplicity. The common life of the neighbourhood was indeed so lost that William Cooper, one of the superintendents of the Sunday School of Darlington Street Chapel, and his wife, a noted class-leader there, who lived with their family in a roomy house in Double Buildings, opened their house for public services, and, aided by the local preachers, were so successful in missioning the neighbourhood that soon there was a strong interest in Wesleyanism, which Cooper's house could no longer contain. Meantime Dainty's house could no longer find accommodation for the numbers who flocked there. Ultimately it was resolved to erect a chapel on a spot somewhere between the two, and the result was the present chapel at Blakenhall—or, at least, two-thirds of it, the other third being added afterwards.

The chapel was opened in 1839 by the Rev. T. Moss. Mr. Riley, the local preacher, must fain go to lay the first brick; but his once sturdy legs having grown too weak for even so short a journey, he was taken in her carriage by Mrs. Thorneycroft, who co-operated in his masonic duties.

The work of Green Lane and the Fighting Cocks converged henceforth to this centre, Mr. Dainty becoming a trustee of the new chapel, having for his colleagues Messrs. G. Spruce, W. Southall, Samuel Griffiths, and others. A Sunday School was opened and held in the chapel for some

time under the superintendence of Mr. Jeremiah Smith, who had been duly told off at Darlington Street for the work. He was already old at the employment, for being a ready penman while yet a boy, he had taught old men in Noah's Ark, and when little more than twelve years old was made a teacher at Darlington Street. When the appointment was proposed, it was objected that he was too young for such a post, but the proposer pointed out that young as he was he could do what two-thirds, perhaps three-fourths, of the members of the learned council then in deliberation could not do—write his own name.

The school grew, and a schoolroom had to be built at the back of the chapel. Attendance and work of chapel and school went on increasing and strengthening, the last cholera epidemic filling the chapel every night. But the mainstay of the place were the miners, and as some pits were worked out and others became unworkable from water, miners were driven elsewhere for work, and, there being but few artisans in the neighbourhood, the congregation became very small. About 1850 the Land Society opened up the Moorfields estate, people from the town came and built houses there, and the congregations changed from miners to artisans. Classes and the school increasing, the trustees agreed to enlarge the chapel one-third or build a new one. Mr. Matthew Frost offered to give a large piece of ground at the top of Villiers Street, near the Water Works, for the latter purpose; but that was too far away, and it was agreed to enlarge the chapel one-third, which was done without any extra debt, teachers and people working well together. At the death of Mr. James Whitehouse he left in his will £100 free, and, the Chapel Loan lending the trustees £100 free of interest, the people worked heartily and cleared all the debt off the chapel, which is estimated in the circuit books to be worth £620.

About Old Monmore Green Chapel, opened in 1838, there is but little known. Prior to that year there was only

a sparse population, mainly of miners, about what was then called the Middle and Lower Greens, the latter being the only part now known as Monmore Green. Upon the Upper Green one sets foot immediately after crossing the Bilston Road canal bridge. What devout miner first made a home for Wesleyanism on the Middle Green I do not know, but shortly before the date above given the growth of the Chillington Works had so multiplied houses and population, and there were so many Wesleyans about, as to justify Mr. Matthew Frost's project for a small chapel; though it was felt from the first that a mistake was made in building it in a back street, the only indication from the main road of its existence being the name of the street—"Chapel Street." Under the cloud of this mistake, and the clouds of smoke from the neighbouring works which came to smother it, the sun of prosperity never penetrated to the Monmore Green Chapel; but nearly forty years passed before the realisation of the wish to remove the cause to more pretentious quarters nearer the heart of the town. How the result was attained, mainly by the efforts of those whom we may call amateur town missionaries, I will tell in my next chapter.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### AMATEUR TOWN MISSIONING.

I AM aware that the word "amateur" is more and more coming to be clothed with a sense of inferiority and to involve the idea of depreciation from, and a reflection upon, the person with whose name it is coupled, so far as regards his relation to that in connection with which the term is employed. To say of a man that he is an "amateur doctor" would not be to recommend him many patients, nor would "amateur actor" bring him many spectators, except in the case of quizzical friends; while an "amateur lawyer" is one who is little likely to be consulted by clients in general, and the law would not allow him to act. It is in no such lowering, not to add reprehensive, sense that I apply the term "amateur" to that deceased, active, and successful Wesleyan Home Missionary in the Wolverhampton Circuit—Mr. William Astle. I use it in the etymological meaning of the term, a "lover," coupled with the anglicised sense of one who seeks to act and do for what he loves out of pure love for it; and, apart from all professional or other established and recognised rule, regulation, office, or distinction, to develop, expand, or diffuse that which he loves. This twofold sense involves an important distinction. A man may love the drama, believe that stage plays—properly written, properly put upon the stage, and the characters

well portrayed—may subserve the highest purposes of intellectual and moral advancement; but though he go to theatre every night and pay much money to see professionals act, and so far manifest his love, that would not constitute him an “amateur” in matters theatrical. He must act himself as well as applaud, admire, and pay for the acting of others. If he act as a member of a regularly constituted company of actors, under the direction and control of its manager, subjecting himself to such examination of his knowledge, skill, and ability as may be required of him, and play such parts only as may be apportioned to him, then such arrangements—with and subject to professional rule, regulation, and control—will constitute him a professional and not an amateur actor. To be that he must be wholly free, free to come and go, free from all control, and bound by no other obligation than love may impose; a lover, in fact, who ceases to be a lover when he becomes a husband, though he will be no true husband if he cease to love.

Now we will get from the drama to religion, from the theatre to the chapel, and from lover and loved, and husband and wife, to Methodist and missionary, and see how, however divergent the objects may seem, they may for the purposes of this “bit” of Wesleyanism in the Old Black Country be viewed from the same standpoint, by briefly following the life and career of the late William Astle, of Wolverhampton. He was not a native of that town, having been, as far as I can learn, born in London, coming to Wolverhampton to be apprenticed to “Putty Ward,” to learn the art and mystery of painting, plumbing and glazing. Until he fell in love with that love which ends in matrimony, William Astle was a lover of the theatre and many other amusements and relaxations which Methodists are taught to regard with any feelings but those akin to love. His love for theatricals, however, never made him an amateur therein. But he fell in love with a

good pious Methodist lady, a Miss Bagnall, whose father and brothers were good Wesleyans as well as men of skill early in the career of the great firm of G. B. Thorneycroft & Co., Edward Thorneycroft himself marrying another Miss Bagnall. William Astle was a true lover, loving not only her to whom he "made love," but loving what she loved. She took him to Darlington Street Chapel, and made him a good Wesleyan, and when he thence took her home "she made him a good wife."

But as time wore on William Astle became discontented with showing his love for religion as he had shown his love for the drama by simply taking and paying for his seat in the building set apart for its public display, and providing for the pulpit as he had once provided for the stage. "He would be an actor" in the religious if not in the dramatic world, and the more so that though the drama did not require him to be an actor, religion did. To "do good and communicate" was to him an express command; and to be a Wesleyan, yet content that Wesleyans should be content with the religion meted out by appointed ministers restricted to certain people who met in certain places of worship with only prayers for those who never came there or went to any other place of worship, seemed to him to rebel against the principles and the practices of the Wesleys, which were to carry the Gospel to those who would not come to church to fetch it. Regarded from this point of view, the regular Wesleyan Church built up on the church irregularities of the Wesleyans was but an enlargement of the bounds keeping out the masses, and which the Wesleys so boldly broke down in order to reach the masses. To be a true Wesleyan, then, he felt he must disregard the restrictions of Wesleyanism. A leadership confined him to a class having no connection with the classes "perishing" for the lack of religion; to be a local preacher would restrict him to times and places, over which he had no choice, to teach those who knew as much as himself. No,



he wanted no "Plan." He would go where he would, and do what he could, doing work that "orders," and "Plans," and "appointments," and "discipline," and routine, and red-tapeism could not do. A most disorderly Wesleyan, truly; and what were the Wesleyans to do with him? For he was a true Wesleyan, wanted every man, woman, and child he could awaken to religious impression to become a Wesleyan. Such a member, the body felt, was rather out of joint, yet promised such useful service in its erratic motions that it was hard to cut off a hand that would feed the body because it had a will of its own that did not always obey the head. So William Astle was permitted to do right in the wrong way. Decidedly wrong in him, the regular preachers, paid and unpaid, thought, that he would not be put on probation, and take his examination, and, if he passed, take his "appointment" according to "Plan;" and decidedly wrong that he and those whom he inoculated with his views should have a separated portion of the Plan to themselves, and be left pretty much to their own planning. The number of such irregulars was but few, and all were swallowed up in No. "1," William Astle himself, who was not only the head and front of all their offending against Wesleyan ecclesiastical rules, but the executive as well as the legislative of the government he set up within the government of the Wesleyan Church as by Conference established in the Wolverhampton Circuit.

His method of procedure was very simple. He would go from house to house,—the worse or the poorer the house the better for his purpose,—praying, exhorting, warning, consoling; or, seizing upon a brother or brethren in his work, carry him or them with him to street corners, put them into "pudding bags," or twist them into "folds," and there hold forth on "death and judgment," meeting with as much rude treatment for their pains as ever the Wesleyans of old did. And the old success followed precisely in the old way. The mob might howl, and the bricks and the stones might fly,

but some of the assailants were sure to be brought to their knees, dragging down others with them. Cottage doors would open to preaching that had an utter contempt for ordinary sermoning, and prayer that reverends, right or wrong, would condemn as irreverent. When cottages grew too small William Astle would set his building craft to work, and, with such means as he had got, what he could gather, and, as the last resource, what he could borrow, run up a wooden chapel, which eventually the circuit would accept with its class money and contributions to the Quarterly Board. Then wood would become stone or brick, or something of both, expand into broad respectability, grow too strong to be any longer fed by the milk supplied by Astle & Co., and, the appetite not satisfied by the solider food brought by the best of the local preachers, would hunger more and more for the daintier meats of the itinerant ministry.

Before particularising the chapels which arose in this way on foundations more or less laid by William Astle, let me give one or two illustrations of the man and his work. I have said that he would go from house to house, and the worse the house the better for his purpose. He would enter the most physically inodorous of common lodging-houses, and bring the most forsaken of tramps to their knees, and he would not hesitate to enter houses of worse moral odour and bring tears into the eyes of the most abandoned of women. But though bold he was prudent ; and one anecdote I know for a fact was characteristic of the man, and the more so when he told it himself. As night was drawing in one evening, he entered the large kitchen of a beggars' and tramps' lodging-house in the town, sat himself down in a vacant seat, and was soon apparently at home among those who, as they came in, began to tell of the good or ill luck they had met with during the day. At last one of them turning to Mr. Astle asked, "Well, mate, what luck have you had?" "Good luck," was the reply, followed by the setting forth of a parable, telling how

he, a poor beggar fellow, going wearily and despairingly along, was met by the way by a gracious kindly man, with a countenance that beamed with goodness through clouds of compassion that made it sorrowful; who, hearing the beggar's sad petition, gave him a book, and bid him read therein how he might not only wash and be clean, and be clothed as never before, but become wealthy with riches no thief could steal, and no rust eat away, and which he could carry with him to the grave, and set himself up for eternity in another world. "And the good man opened the book and read this." Suiting the action to the word, Mr. Astle laid an open New Testament upon the table and read from it, to the surprise and interest of some, and the ill-suppressed contempt of others, who looked as though they felt that they were "sold," and ready to exclaim, "Shut up." The reading done, Mr. Astle told how he and the good man fell on their knees and prayed, and was soon on his knees with one or two by his side; but he added that, while he prayed, seeing the increasing ill looks of others, he "kept one eye open."

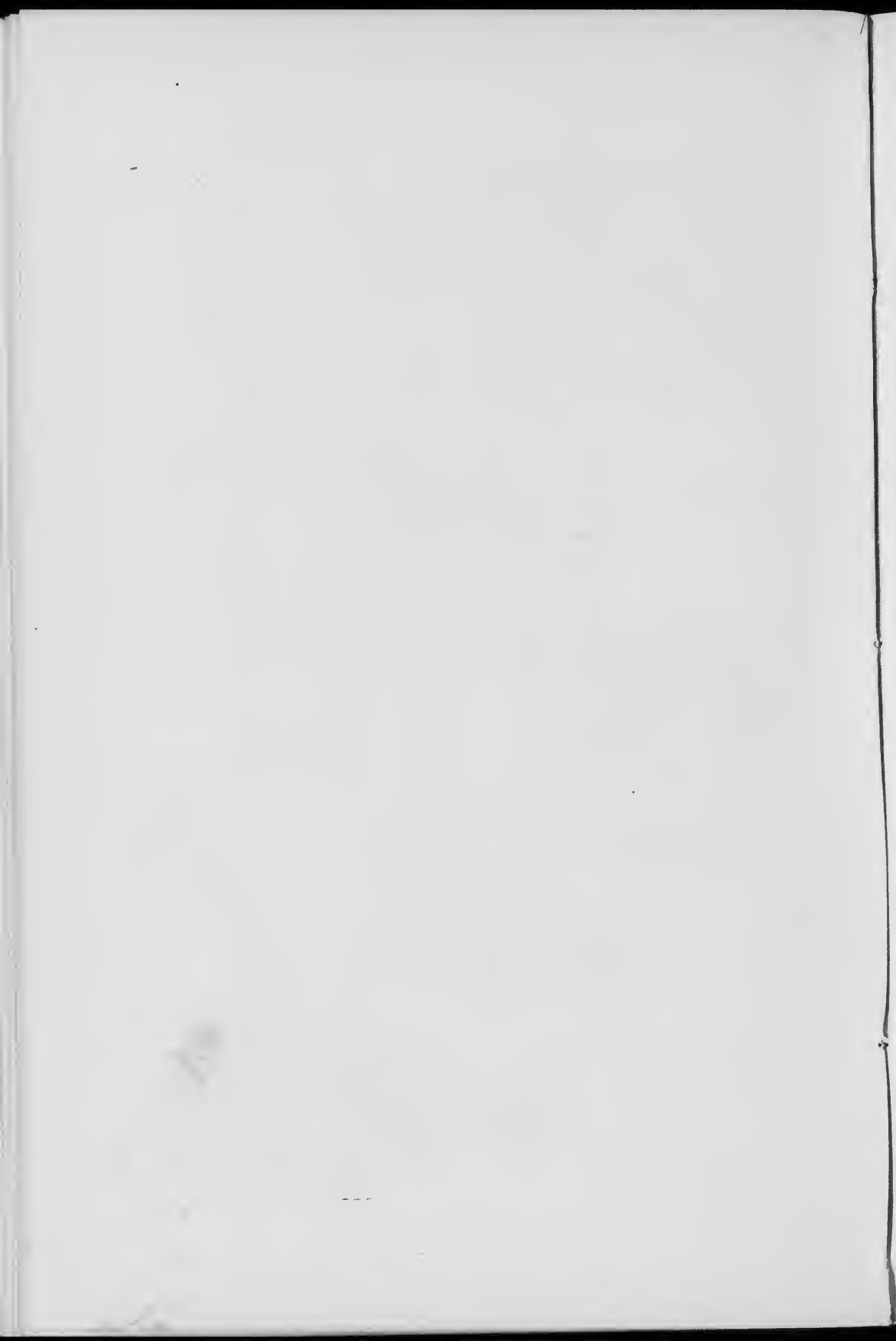
Characteristic this of the man all his lifetime, but for the better and latter part of his life the one eye had been open, not for his own worldly interest, but for what he deemed the higher and better interests of others. There was much of this in a still higher sense in John Wesley himself. In burning eloquence, in soul-and-body-consuming earnestness, Whitefield was his master, and for awhile had more followers. But he could not keep them, could not provide them, could not protect them, nor so enlist, drill, and train them to watch and ward that they should protect and perpetuate themselves. He had not "one eye open." Whitefieldites have long since been unknown in name, scarcely exist in fact, while everywhere Wesleyans abound—and flourish where they keep "one eye open."

The evangelical preaching and praying attack which he organised and headed, on "that stronghold of Satan," the

racecourse at Wolverhampton on the Sunday preceding the annual race carnival of 1857, still lingers in the memory of local sportsmen and local evangelists as one example of his courage. The very air was tainted and "the Lord's Day" unspeakably desecrated on every recurring Race Sunday, and, apart from all religious and sectarian consideration, the place on that day, at least, became a moral plague spot which all decent peace-and-order-loving inhabitants would fain have wiped from the town. But "proputtty, proputtty, proputtty," as the Poet Laureate sings, ruled, and, as those directly and indirectly interested in the proprietary and the private rights of the races made more by it on that one day than otherwise could be made in a year, the public—or at least that portion of it given to the exercise—could only pray that an end might come to such things. The Wesleyans had prayed most, being most closely interested, Darlington Street Chapel being for long years the nearest place of worship to the course; and directly facing the Waterloo Road, down which throngs were ever streaming from Saturday night to Thursday morning, to the racecourse. The Wesleyans would hang mottoed banners—the mottoes fear-inspiring enough, they thought—on the outer walls of their citadel, but would prudently retire within their stronghold to pray. For nearly fifty years they had prayed in vain. Forty years before William Astle thought it was time to work as well as pray, some good old Wesleyans, while praying lustily in the underground school of the chapel, while the mob still more lustily cheered the running horses on the racecourse, were seized with the sudden fear that they had prayed too much, and went home in a panic. "Lord, bare Thine arm, and let Thy wrath come down," they had cried, and it seemed to the astounded "prayer leaders" and followers that the prayer was as suddenly as unexpectedly answered; for the lightning flashed with terrific glare, the very floodgates of the heavens seemed open and pouring drowning waters, while peal on peal of heavy



WILLIAM ASTLE IN A BEGGARS' KITCHEN.—P. 103.



rolling thunder threatened to bring down the walls of the chapel and bury them, as they prayed, in the vault beneath. They had not prayed for that, so they closed the meeting, and picked their way home as best they could through the flooded streets, while vans and carts drove about the racecourse to rescue women and children from the deluge that had stopped the races as well as the prayer meeting.

When resolved to strive as well as pray for the putting down of the scenes that disgraced the racecourse on "Race Sunday," William Astle generously gave notice to the Race Committee of his intention that their vast Sunday congregation should not go without religious services. The answer was printed and posted and borne pasted on boards by men about the course—"No itinerant preachers or their followers will be permitted on the racecourse," and when William Astle and his followers placed their feet upon the course, Bedlam broke loose and carried them off their feet; and they only found their feet again when once more on a road that led to the course. Here they sought to make a stand, and appealed to the police to protect them from assault. The appeal was in vain, and it was with difficulty that some civilians helped them to get away from the sticks and stones of the murderous mob, Mr. Astle being struck with stones some twenty times. One of them, a pound in weight, which happily missed him, he carried to the Chief Constable, to whom he complained of the neglect of duty of the police. The Chief Constable would hear of no such charge, but public opinion was so excited that the Watch Committee could not refuse an inquiry, though they resolved to hold it with closed doors. That resolution had to give way to the Press. When the evidence had been taken, and the committee met to draw up their report, the Mayor (the late Mr. E. Perry), who was chairman, summing up the evidence, said that "No person of unbiassed mind could come to any other conclusion than that the police had not done their duty, that they not only did nothing to interfere with the

roughs, but exceeded their duty by threatening to take respectable people into custody who complained of ill-usage."

The "itinerants" were thus for the time being beaten off the racecourse; but they left their mark there of better things to come. The racecourse is now a park, and in the slow yet sure process of moral growth in a people the "itinerant" foot that William Astle, in 1857, put on that racecourse was the first step to that park.





## CHAPTER XV.

### HIGH AND LOW CHURCH WESLEYANISM.

WILLIAM WEBB was among those who came out of "Noah's Ark," and was not only first appointed a leader in Darlington Street, but was the first leader ever appointed there. He was born at Stourbridge in 1784, and his family may be traced for many generations back in the registers of Oldswinford Church. When about ten years old, in a year of scarce harvest and when bread was at famine prices he paid his first visit to Wolverhampton to buy flour for his mother, and added to the distress of his family by going back with a shilling's worth of "pikelets," as Black Country folks term what the Cockneys call "crumpets." He ran great risk of having even this bit for the hungry ones at home snatched from him by some one hungrier than himself, as he stood gaping with wonder at a workman finishing the spire of St. John's Church. Not a "one-eye-open" Christian yet, or too young, like a kitten, to open it. The next time he came to Wolverhampton he saw enough in the first few years of the long life he passed there to have opened both eyes, for he came as an apprentice to a key forger, who had his smithy near the Pear-tree at Shareshill. That enterprising keymaker, who never dreamt of stamping and press keymaking, spent more of his time at the Pear-tree than he did in his smithy, living—as well

as a man can live on drink—on the labour of the little white slaves he called his apprentices, whose chief work was to file the rough keys he or a big boy forged on the anvil. He never deigned to vulcanise his inebriation until night came and the apprentices were weary for bed ; and sad was the fate of the one whom he condemned to work the bellows. Nothing was too brutal to assist him to keep awake, one poor little wretch caught asleep with his mouth open having a bit of burning breeze put into it to wake him up. From eighteen to twenty hours a day did the poor little fellows work, breakfast and dinner being the only meals for which they were allowed to leave the shop ; and Mr. Webb would wonder how when such work spared his life the little rest he got did not kill him, for when he did get to the room that contained it he would throw himself dressed and dirty on his bed and fall at once to sleep, never staying to close the latticed window, however desperate might be the weather. The fare was as hard as the work, the cheese served out to them being so repulsive to teeth that frequently the surest and easiest way of getting it into their hungry stomachs was to put it into a vice, file it, and spread the filings on the bread !

What wonder that when such a poor apprentice slave was set free to rest and rouse as a journeyman he abused his liberty, and aped the only ease he had ever seen, that of his guzzling and brutal master ? One evening, however, William Webb, like many another of that day, was attracted by the music and singing into Noah's Ark Chapel ; he remained to pray, and came out converted. He joined the class of a famous leader of those days, Mr. Spittle, and when that leader gave up his class, after the removal of the society to Darlington Street, Mr. Webb thought it no small honour to be appointed to his place, and that the distinction was well deserved was proved by the fact that he continued to lead it until the weight of eighty years compelled him to resign its charge in 1864. Concurrently with his leadership,

he had prayer meetings at his house every Sunday, and continued them as long as he could pray; but he had to change his house to do so, for the landlord of the premises in which he commenced the service swore he would have no "Methodist devils" in a house of his, and compelled Mr. Webb to move to the house in which he died, in Brickkiln Street; and strong was Mr. Webb's sense of a judgment to come when, soon after the removal, that unhappy, cursing landlord was found dead in his chair.

William Webb became a famous class leader, having three classes, which counted among their members the late Mr. John Hartley, Mr. J. B. Whitehouse, and the leading members of the society. He was not content with this labour, but was ever visiting the homes of the poor, and was specially sought to comfort the sick and dying. No disease had any terrors for him. The cholera could not appal him, for during its last visitation in 1848 he was so often at the bedside of the dying that he knew not his own bed for nine nights consecutively; and when the epidemic ceased he was so broken down that he had to seek health and strength in retirement to a country friend's quarters.

To his reputation as a leader and for home mission work he added that of much knowledge in the Scriptures, and was visited by members of all denominations anxious to have doubts resolved or fears dispelled. Thus labouring at his own cost until he was three score years and three he was wise enough and humble enough, when his hands could no longer minister to the necessities of his body, to accept a small weekly recompense for the continuation of the labours he had so long done for nought—labours which largely swelled the results of William Astle's self-imposed missioning task.

Not altogether owing to, yet largely aided by, those results was the addition of the chapel at the Whitmore Reans, opened in 1860, and towards the cost of which Mr. Thorneycroft largely contributed. The chapel which followed at

Springfields two years afterwards was wholly the outcome of the zeal of Mr. Astle, who was personally responsible for a debt upon it until the circuit made it its own. Then he put up wooden chapels at the bottom of Poultney Street, and one of large dimensions opposite the Workhouse in the Bilston Road, aided in the pecuniary outlay by some of his co-workers, and the generosity of the lady patroness of his labours, Mrs. Thorneycroft. In these humble erections the work went bravely on, and there were strong efforts for their expansion into larger and more endurable buildings; but while all classes of Wesleyans rejoiced more or less in this revival of the old methods and their success there was a very influential minority that had long thought the time had come when there should be erected in the town a chapel, which, by the character of its structure, and the order of its services, should assist and support more emphatically the claims of Wesleyanism to be regarded as a Church. These views had found an exponent in Mr. H. H. Fowler, now M.P. for the borough. Himself the son of a Wesleyan minister of bold, vigorous, and independent thought, whose wife was sister to the late Mr. John Hartley, the husband of the youngest daughter of the late Mr. G. B. Thorneycroft, and himself a leading solicitor of the town, Mr. Fowler was doubly pledged to Wesleyanism—to its great whole, and to its flourishingly local part at Wolverhampton. He has ably and generously redeemed both pledges.

In a lecture on "The Institution of Wesleyan Methodism," delivered on behalf of the Wolverhampton Wesleyan Mutual Improvement Society in 1858, Mr. Fowler showed himself to be a staunch Wesleyan; but compared, as far as they are comparable, Wesleyan chapels with Established churches of the High Church type, which afterwards found substantial expression in Trinity Chapel. Here is the forecast. Introducing the second part of his lecture, Mr. Fowler said:—"The liturgical services of the Established Church, and the extempore devotions of the Presbyterian and Noncon-

forming Churches, are combined in the public worship of Wesleyan Methodists ; and here, as in other parts of our economy, our present position is the result of the gradual development of our system. Originally the public service in the Methodist chapels assumed previous public prayer at the parish church, and usages—liberties we may call them—which were comparatively unimportant when the Methodist chapel was but the meeting house of the society who regularly worshipped at the parish church, are as inappropriate as they are improper when that chapel has become the temple in which a Christian Church stately and inclusively worships Almighty God. After Mr. Wesley's death, when it was evident that in the course of events, or rather in the order of Providence, Methodism *had* become a distinct section of the Catholic Church, the Conference, in defining the regulations for public worship, enacted that wherever Divine service was performed in England on the Lord's Day in church hours the officiating preacher should read either the service of the Established Church, Mr. Wesley's abridgment of the service, or, *at least*, the lessons appointed by the calendar ; and the Conference added a strong recommendation in favour of the liturgical service. If I may venture an individual opinion, I will express my regret that the Conference allowed of the alternative of reading the lessons, instead of making the use of the liturgy compulsory. I hope the day will come when our Church, while rejoicing in the fullest freedom of devotional exercise, will universally incorporate into its public worship the Litany and the Collects, which the piety of forty generations of Christians has found to be alike the truest and sublimest expressions of earthly prayer. The practice which prevails in all metropolitan and in many of the principal provincial chapels of reading the liturgy of the Church of England in the Sunday morning service is ably justified by the greatest theologian whom Methodism has produced. Richard Watson says ' that the Sunday forenoon should be marked

by the most solemn and lengthened acts of Divine service ; that incorporating the liturgy into that service secures the reading of a large portion of the Scriptures ; it also secures the four grand parts of public prayer, deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving, and it makes the service of God's House appear more like our true business on the Lord's Day.' "

Ably and impartially Mr. Fowler summed up the whole question when in the same lecture he said : " Ritual and Church ordinances, so far as the Church is at liberty to modify them, are necessarily affected by the prevailing mental type of their respective eras. No wonder that men but just emancipated from the Satanic thralldom of Popery flung from them, as tainted with incurable heresy, every shred and particle with which the peculiar usages of Rome were associated ; nor is it matter of surprise that the cultivated intellect and the refined affection of modern days should shrink from the cold intellectualism which disdains all ceremonials, and should seek in the various glories of God's material creation the aids and helps of a spiritual devotion. Each class must sympathise with the other, and while rejoicing that the peculiar exigencies of its own religious preferences are fully met, should accord to the preferences of the other as sincere a faith and as true a devotion."

In this kindly and considerate spirit was the question discussed not very long after whether there should be a higher Wesleyan chapel erected, or another on the lower and commoner level for which Mr. Astle had prepared the way. The wooden chapel opposite the Workhouse on the Bilston Road was becoming all too small for the growing cause, and if it were put into a substantial structure the good folks at Middle Monmore Green would gladly come to the front, and the sale of the old building would help the new. But that would not be help enough, and they from whom help must come urged that money could be much more

easily raised for the Compton than the Bilston Road, that the former would not only pay, but yield a profit to the circuit; and that they who wished to go to the Compton Road, when housed to their taste there, would be ready and willing to help to build and support for those not so well off in this world's goods. At a meeting held at Mr. Thorneycroft's in 1862, at which the leading members of the circuit and Mr. Astle were present, these pleas prevailed, and Trinity Chapel was resolved upon, Mr. J. Hartley giving the site, and heading the building fund with a donation of £1,000. Mr. H. H. Fowler followed with £500, Mr. J. Perks £200, Mr. Thorneycroft £150, and Mr. Isaac Jenks, Miss Shaw, and Messrs. Wright and North £100 each. At the subsequent quarterly meeting of the circuit permission was given for the erection of the chapel and the use of the Church of England service in the morning. At a great tea meeting which followed, Mr. Fowler showed how high Wesleyanism thus raised was brought to the Established Church. He claimed for Wesleyans that they were "neither Churchmen nor Dissenters," but "formed a denomination that occupied a middle point between the two great conflicting ecclesiastical interests of this country—so constituted as to become the friends of all and the enemies of none; yet nevertheless having its disadvantages, never getting justice done to it by either one or the other of the conflicting parties, yet a great contribution to the spiritual commonwealth of the country, and binding the conflicting parties together to the great Catholic Church. He was ready to justify the position they held as Nonconformists, not as Dissenters, he said, for they never dissented from the Church—they were turned out of it. That fact Methodists should never lose sight of, and when they called to mind those great questions which surged to the surface in the present day, and when they called to mind that not only their great founder himself, but also his immortal brother, with that great theologian, the

power of whose argumentative abilities only lost its lustre when contrasted with his saintly character—John Fletcher ; when they remembered that these and Thomas Coke, the founder of the missionary movement, were all clergymen of the Church of England, they must never forget that they could not assume the position of Dissenters without completely forfeiting their reputation as the successors of such men as those he had named, and without throwing away some of their hereditary glories. But they might be asked, Why don't you belong to the Church still? His answer to that was that they were thrust out, repelled from the Lord's table, deprived almost of civil rights, and they did not care to go back again, for they preferred their own system of worship."

The following year the chapel was opened for Divine worship, and amply met the requirements which five years previously Mr. Fowler had told his hearers of the Darlington Street Mutual Improvement Society were those of the temples. To the eye of good taste the building is, within and without, of a most satisfactory character, and an ornament and a pleasure among the many good public buildings of the town, not a penny of its cost and that of added schools, £5,278, being mis-spent. The result fully justified the expectation that the society would prove annually profitable to the circuit, that profit figuring £100 ; and two years afterwards a large and commodious chapel was built by the side of the Workhouse, on the Bilston Road, taking the place of the wooden erection opposite, and eventually absorbing the old society and the old chapel at Monmore Green. The site, value £500, was given by Mr. W. Bayliss, and Mr. Isaac Jenks gave £1,000, and Mr. E. T. Wright £500, towards the building ; but I am afraid the demonstrative lady who exclaimed at a Darlington Street lovefeast, "We are all going to heaven in the wooden chapel," and pointedly suggested that it had a great advantage in that respect over more pretentious structures, was not content with the change,



but transferred her Wesleyan membership to the last of the wooden chapels, that which Mr. Astle ran up at the bottom of Poultney Street. That is no more. It grew into the chapel opened in Mander Street, Penn Road, at a cost of £1,920, Mr. David North giving the site, value £420. It was opened in 1878. Mr. Astle had before then gone to give an account of his amateur missionary work—and there was none to take his place.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A LIST OF WESLEYAN WORTHIES.

THANKS to many "bits" that have come into my hands, and more especially to those which have come to me from the hands of Mr. W. Jones, J.P., of Stafford, I am enabled before closing my chapters on all relating to the Wolverhampton Circuit of Wesleyan Methodism to add to the information I have already given as to its earlier history.

As we have seen, Wesley's first visit to Wolverhampton was in 1760; but whether it then formed any part of a circuit, and where he preached, there is no record to show, for the first list of circuits was not published until three years afterwards. That list showed that there were in England only twenty, in Scotland two, in Wales two, and in Ireland seven—in all thirty-one circuits. The English circuits were:—London, Sussex, Norwich, Bedford, Wiltshire, Bristol, Devonshire, Cornwall, Staffordshire, Chester, Whitehaven, Lincolnshire, Sheffield, Leeds, Birstall, Haworth, York, Yarm, The Dales, and Newcastle.

Wolverhampton was, of course, in the Staffordshire Circuit, but that the circuit took in much more than the county is evident from the above. It embraced, in fact, most of the adjoining counties of Derby, Warwick, Worcester, and Salop, and ran its line even into Gloucester. No list

of preachers' circuit appointments was published until two years afterwards, but we know by an extract from his journal that Alexander Mather was then stationed in the circuit, and that though Wolverhampton was not the head of the circuit, it was the head of fierce enmity to Methodism, as the extract in question shows.

"In 1763," says Mather, "God revived His work in the Staffordshire Circuit, especially at Birmingham. This year a meeting house was built at Stroud, and another at Wolverhampton. But this was not long-lived, for soon after the mob assaulted it and pulled it down to the ground. They had raged for a long time, insomuch that it was difficult for a Methodist to pass the streets, and no one could hardly appear in them but at the risk of losing his life. The rioters had broken many of their windows, and swore that they would pull down their houses and every preaching house near. Hearing of this at Stroud I rode over immediately and found the whole country in terror, as they expected every minute the mob from Wolverhampton to pull down the preaching houses at Dudley, Darlaston, and Wednesbury, with the houses of the Methodists. They first came to Darlaston, the place being famous for rioting, hoping to meet a good encouragement. But a big butcher, who lived near the house, hearing an alarm, leaped out of bed, seized his cleaver, and running out, swore that he would kill the first man that meddled with the chapel. So unexpected a reception quite discouraged the mob, and they went away faster than they came. Here we saw the good effect which the late revival had upon the town in general. There were few left who would either persecute themselves or suffer others to do it. But Wolverhampton itself was still aflame. A friend who was to accompany me to the town had procured a pair of pocket pistols. He offered me one, but I told him, 'No, I am in God's work, and trust to Him for protection. And you must rely on your pistols, or I cannot accept of your company.' He did so. When I came to the end of the town the alarm was quickly spread, so that before we came into the main street we had company enough. But they were restrained, so that we received little abuse further than bad language. I immediately went to the justice, who granted a warrant, but the constable gave notice of it to the rioters, so that none were taken. Some

fled, some hid themselves, and the rest set the justices at defiance. This occasioned several neighbouring justices to fix a day for meeting in the town. When they met several rioters were brought before them. They were bound over to appear at Stafford, where all the magistrates gave attendance. The proof against the rioters was full, yet the jury acquitted them all. This gave them fresh spirits, so they hasted home with ribbons flying, and were saluted with bells and bonfires, in one of which they burned me and my friend in effigy. Our friends now found it more dangerous than ever to come into the town or get to their houses. Before I left I waited on Lord D——, with Mr. Hayes, attorney, the person who prepared the mob, and himself made the first breach of the peace. I told him plainly, 'Either let Mr. Hayes rebuild the house, or we will try him for his life.' He preferred to rebuild the house in such a time, and it was built accordingly. So did God deliver us out of this complicated trouble, and all the time His work prospered."

The "preaching house" which Hayes thus set both law and Gospel at defiance to bring to the ground was situated in Rotton Row or Canal Street, as it is now called, and was but the third approach to a chapel that the Wesleyans had set up in the whole county. The first was at Tipton Green, opened in 1750, and the second at Wednesbury, which was opened ten years later. Within the next eighteen years only six others were added: Burton-on-Trent, 1766; Burslem, 1768; Newcastle, 1777; Bloxwich, 1780; Longnor, 1780; and Lane End, 1781. During that period Worcestershire, without one at the beginning, added two: Dudley, 1764; and Worcester, 1772; while Shropshire began by building three: Shrewsbury and Madeley Wood, each in 1779; and Madeley, 1780. Warwickshire opened out with one chapel—that of Cherry Street, Birmingham; but Derbyshire appears not to have boasted a Wesleyan chapel before the close of the eighteenth century. Gloucestershire, so far as it was served by the Staffordshire Circuit, added, in 1768, Tewkesbury to Stroud.

Wednesbury appears to have been the head of the

Staffordshire Circuit, but when in 1782 it was subdivided Birmingham was made the head of a circuit embracing one-half of the county, the southern, and the next year Burslem was made the head of another embracing the other half of Staffordshire. Birmingham, however, in five years grew too large to get nearer to Wolverhampton than Wednesbury, so Wolverhampton was made the head of a circuit comprising the remainder of South Staffordshire, with no small portion of Worcestershire and Shropshire added. In 1793, Shrewsbury became the head of a new circuit, and next year Dudley was made a circuit, which took in all that was left to Wolverhampton, and absorbed that circuit, but only until 1804, when Wolverhampton became once more the head of a circuit. Meantime the area it had previously embraced was subdivided into the following circuits:—Worcester, 1795; Burton and Lichfield, 1797; and Wednesbury, 1801. The northern part of the county had equally grown in circuits, Leek being made a separate circuit in 1793, Congleton in 1803, and Newcastle in 1804, the county town not becoming the head of a circuit until 1808.

The chapels added in Staffordshire from 1782 to 1802 were—Hanley Green, 1783; Bilston, 1784; Leek, 1785; Stafford, 1785; Biddle Moor, 1786; Flash, 1788; Tunstall, 1788; Chesterton, 1790; Darlaston, 1790; Stoke, 1790; Tamworth, 1794; West Bromwich, 1794; Oldbury, 1800; Walsall, 1801; Rolleston, 1802; Alrewas, 1802.

The following are the names of the ministers who itinerated during the years of the great and comprehensive Staffordshire Circuit from 1765 until its close in 1781:—

1765.—Thomas Hanson, William Orpe, James Glazebrook.

1766.—W. Orpe, Nicholas Manners, John Poole.

1767.—Thomas Hanby, Robert Roberts, John Wesley.

1768.—John Pawson, J. Wesley, John Allen.

1769.—James Glazebrook, James Clough, Jeremiah Robertshaw.

- 1770.—J. Robertshaw, J. Clough.
- 1771.—Robert Costerdine, Richard Teed.
- 1772.—Thomas Briscoe, Thomas Hanby.
- 1773.—Thomas Hanby, Joseph Harper.
- 1774.—John Shaw, Edward Slater.
- 1775.—Alexander Mather, William Dufton.
- 1776.—Alexander Mather, John Wittam.
- 1777.—Thomas Taylor, John Whitley.
- 1778.—Thomas Mitchell, William Horner.
- 1779.—Thomas Mitchell, Robert Costerdine.
- 1780.—John Broadbent, Robert Swan.
- 1781.—John Broadbent, John Goodwin, Thomas Hanby.

During the next five years Wolverhampton was part of the Birmingham Circuit, and had the services of the following itinerants :—

- 1782.—John Easton, Thomas Hanby, Samuel Randall.
- 1783.—Richard Rodda, Charles Boon.
- 1784.—R. Rodda, Thomas Warwick.
- 1785.—Andrew Blair, George Story, R. Costerdine—John Brettell, supernumerary.
- 1786.—A. Blair, John Murlin, Duncan Wright—J. Brettell, supernumerary.

For the first period of its existence as an independent circuit the following travelling preachers found a home in Wolverhampton during the years named :—

- 1787.—John Leech and William Saunders—Melville Horne, supernumerary.
- 1788.—John Leech, John Brettell—M. Horne, supernumerary.
- 1789.—Thomas Cooper, Jeremiah Brettell—M. Horne, supernumerary.
- 1790.—Jeremiah Brettell, Robert Lomas—M. Horne, supernumerary.
- 1791.—Alexander Suter, Simon Day—M. Horne, supernumerary.
- 1792.—A. Suter, Robert Costerdine.
- 1793.—Theophilus Lessey, William Saunderson.

The following were the ministers while Wolverhampton was connected with the Dudley circuit :—

- 1794.—Theophilus Lessey, G. Dermott, John Ashall.
- 1795.—John Woodrow, James Watson, Jonathan Barker.
- 1796.—Joseph Taylor, John Simpson, William Hicks.
- 1797.—James Taylor, James Bridgnell, John Burdsall.
- 1798.—John Pritchard, John Booth, John Jones.
- 1799.—J. Pritchard, Lawrence Kane.
- 1800.—Lawrence Kane, Sam Taylor.
- 1801.—Samuel Taylor, John Wood.
- 1802.—Robert Hopkins, J. Wood.
- 1803.—R. Hopkins, Peter Haslam.

From the time that Wolverhampton once more became the head of a circuit, the following is the ministerial roll :—

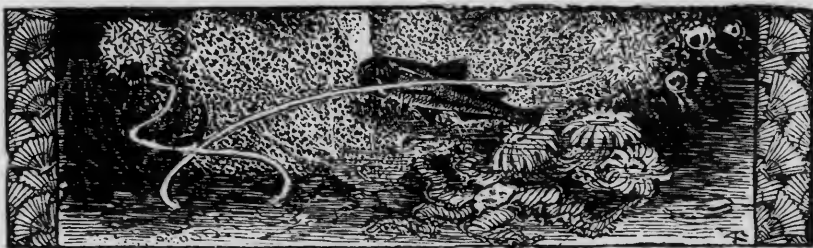
- 1804.—Peter Haslam, James Blackett.
- 1805.—George Baldwin, Henry Anderson.
- 1806.—George Baldwin, Henry Anderson.
- 1807.—Joseph Brookhouse, James Mole.
- 1808.—J. Brookhouse, William Bird.
- 1809.—James Scholefield, George Sykes, sen.
- 1810.—William Holmes, George Sykes, sen.
- 1811.—George Deverell, David Clarke.
- 1812.—George Deverell, Josiah Goodwin.
- 1813.—William Harrison, sen., William Homer.
- 1814.—William Harrison, sen., John Walton.
- 1815.—John Walton, John Mason, jun.
- 1816.—Edward Milward, John Mason, jun.
- 1817.—Edward Milward, John Mason, jun.
- 1818—1819.—John Denton, James Allen.
- 1820.—Thomas Simmonite, John Squarebridge—James Spink, supernumerary.
- 1821.—John A. Lomas, James Beckwith.
- 1822.—John A. Lomas, William Sleigh.
- 1823.—Thomas Ashton, William Sleigh.
- 1824—1825.—Thomas Ashton, Titus Close.
- 1826.—Arthur G. Jewitt, Titus Close.
- 1827.—Arthur G. Jewitt, R. Melson.
- 1828—1829.—John Hodgson, W. Homer.

- 1830—1831.—Corbett Cooke, Isaac Denison.  
 1832—1833.—Samuel Sewell, Thomas Hall.  
 1834.—Samuel Sewell, Thomas Moss.  
 1835—1836.—Thomas Moss, Thomas Hardy.  
 1837.—William Bird, Thomas Hardy.  
 1838.—William Bird, W. Bytheway, J. D. Julian.  
 1839.—William Bird, W. Bytheway, J. R. Hall.  
 1840.—Samuel Webb, J. Walton, J. Skidmore.  
 1841.—Samuel Webb, J. Walton, M. Andrew.  
 1842—1843.—Samuel Webb, Aquila Barber, F. Griffiths.  
 1844—1845.—J. Geden, John Nicklin, B. John.  
 1846.—G. H. Rowe, B. John, W. R. Rogers.  
 1847—1848.—G. H. Rowe, W. R. Rogers, J. Osborn.  
 1849.—R. Sherwell, James Clapham, J. Osborn.  
 1850—1851.—R. Sherwell, J. H. Norton.  
 1852.—John Kirk, H. Smallwood, J. H. Norton.  
 1853—1854.—J. Kirk, H. Smallwood, T. Capp.  
 1855.—William Allen, John Parkes, T. Capp.  
 1856.—William Allen, J. G. Cox, G. C. Taylor.  
 1857.—Edward Brice, J. G. Cox, G. C. Taylor.  
 1858.—Edward Brice, J. G. Cox, J. Broadbent.  
 1859—1860.—J. Hargreaves, S. Kent, J. F. Moody, H. W. Holland, T. Allen.  
 1861.—J. Hargreaves, S. Kent, J. F. Moody, H. W. Holland, M. Shaw.  
 1862.—G. B. Macdonald, A. Davey, N. Stevens, G. Curnock, W. D. Tyack.  
 1863.—B. B. Waddy, A. Davey, N. Stevens, G. Curnock, W. D. Tyack.  
 1864—1865.—B. B. Waddy, J. B. Dunn, T. Barr.  
 1866.—W. Hurt, J. P. Dunn, T. Barr.  
 1867.—W. Hurt, J. P. Dunn, J. A. B. Harry.  
 1868.—W. Hurt, S. H. Tindall, W. Baxter.  
 1869—1870.—W. Hirst, J. Brewster, W. Baxter.  
 1871.—W. Hirst, J. Brewster, J. Emberton.  
 1872—1873.—J. Eglinton, W. J. Frankland, J. Emberton.  
 1874.—J. Eglinton, W. J. Frankland, W. Gibson, G. C. Harvard.  
 1875.—G. B. Mellor, I. E. Page, W. Gibson, G. C. Harvard.  
 1876.—G. B. Mellor, I. E. Page, W. Gibson, W. Muncaster.



- 1877.—G. B. Mellor, I. E. Page, W. G. Hall, W. Muncaster.  
1878.—W. G. Hall, E. R. Edwards, A. O. Smith, B.A.  
1879—1880.—E. R. Edwards, J. Gibson, A. O. Smith, B.A.  
1881.—T. Haslam, C. Winter, J. Gibson, N. J. Willis.  
1882—1883.—T. Haslam, W. Jackson, C. Winter, N. J. Willis.  
1884.—C. F. Nightingale, A. Llewellyn, W. Jackson, and J. S. Lidgett, M.A.

Connected with these bare facts and plain figures are some interesting notes and comments which I will reserve for my concluding chapter on Wolverhampton and its circuit Wesleyanism.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### MAKING BISHOPS AND PROGRESS.

THE three Bishops that the Presbyterian hands of John Wesley made were all more or less connected with the Old Black Country, and had some connection with the old Wesleyan circuit which embraced Wolverhampton. Bishop Asbury, the best and noblest of them all, was a native of the old Staffordshire Circuit ; Bishop Coke, whose hands conveyed whatever of bishop-making virtue flowed from those of John Wesley to the head of Asbury in America, found a wife at Bilston ; and Bishop Mather was one of the earliest itinerants of the circuit of which Wolverhampton formed a part.

Francis Asbury was born on the 20th of August, 1745, at the foot of Hempstead Bridge, in the parish of Handsworth, of "amiable and respectable" parents, sufficiently well off in the world to give him a pretty good education, for those times, at a private school. At fourteen years of age he was apprenticed, and became an inmate of a household congenial to the development of the religious seed his pious mother had sown on the kindly soil of both his feelings and understanding. His faith was strengthened and his enjoyment of religious exercises was heightened by his constant attendance on the services at Old Bromwich Church, where he heard such distinguished preachers and

ministers of the Church as Ryland, Stillingfleet, Talbot, Bagnall, Mansfield, Hawes, and Fenn. He heard of the Methodists, and he went to their meeting house at Wednesbury. The Wesleyans who in these days aspire to temples, and despise meeting houses as the day not only of small things, but of things no longer to be tolerated, should be scandalised to learn that a Churchman who had the making of a Bishop in him preferred that meeting house to the temple in which he had hitherto worshipped, writing, "It was better than a church, the people were so devout; men and women kneeling, and all saying, 'Amen.'" Then after prayer, "with the spirit and understanding they all united in singing a hymn of praise." After this one will not be surprised to learn that this degenerate son of the temple, after listening to most of the great Church pulpit orators of the day, preferred the plain, practical, "unctuous" sermon preached, without manuscript, in that meeting house by a plain man in plain clothes, who had never seen a college or university. He deserted the temple for the meeting house, went to class in a cottage at Bromwich Heath, and set up prayer meetings in houses in his own neighbourhood. Driven from them he made a church of his parents' house, and went out preaching in the neighbourhood, being especially successful at Sutton Coldfield. The fervency and eloquence which characterised his prayers and exhortations excited the wonder even of the enthusiastic and zealous Wesleyans of those days. Made a local preacher in his seventeenth year, he attracted thousands, and he itinerated before he became an itinerant, going into all the counties that were embraced in the Staffordshire Circuit. In 1771 he went as a travelling preacher to the Conference at Bristol, and there volunteered to go out to what afterwards became the United States. John Wesley accepted the offer, and added him to Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, who had been sent out two years before. With "a few pounds and a small amount of clothing" Asbury embarked at

Bristol, and did not reach the other side of the Atlantic until after nine weeks of stormy waters; and then his troubles began—troubles which far exceeded those of Wesleyan preachers in the Mother Country, even of those days. No circuits, no chapels even; wilds and wastes, virgin forests and rolling prairies to be traversed, and ever and anon flight to be made from the danger and death of civil war.

There is a great temptation here to tell how Asbury found in the new green country as in the Old Black Country, it was the zealous member, the earnest leader, the enthusiastic local preacher who, in spite of opposition from churches and chapels, and persecution from Churchmen and Dissenters, prepared the way for the itinerant; but I must hasten on to tell how, in this case, they prepared the way for a minister whom Wesleyanism in the Old Black Country had trained up long before John Wesley stretched his hands across the broad Atlantic and ordained him. It was the close of the civil war and the entire separation of the American colonies from the Mother Country that seemed to John Wesley to give him his opportunity. He found it in the fact that, while in the now independent provinces a civil authority was exercised over them, partly by the Congress and partly by the State Assemblies, no one exercised or claimed any ecclesiastical authority at all. This left the Bishops there without any legal jurisdiction, and Mr. Wesley held that he could under those circumstances ordain Presbyters and send them there, because, by so doing, "he violated no order, and invaded no man's right." But according to the order of episcopacy the right of ordaining Presbyter or Bishop lay with the episcopacy only. So had thought John Wesley some years before, when, anxious for the co-operation of an ordained minister to assist him in dispensing the sacraments among his followers, he, to the great scandal of his brother Charles, got a Greek Bishop to ordain an itinerant preacher; but when several others

obtained ordination at the same hands without his consent, he declined to avail himself either of their services or those of his own presentation. Doubtless the feeling that led him to resist the importunities of his brother and several parochial clergymen—that where the parish minister sympathised with and favoured the Methodist movement, the superintendence of it in his parish should be left to such minister—prevailed also in this instance; for even if words were wanting, his every act told that he felt that if Wesleyanism were to flourish John Wesley must hold and govern in all things.

There was clearly no room for such a man in the Church of England. There would have been plenty for him in the Church of Rome, and a pope would have made of John Wesley's disorderlies an admirable Order, and Wesley would have ruled at its head as Ignatius Loyola did at the head of the Jesuits. But an English primate was all too small for so great a work, and as the Church for which he sought to do all would do nothing for John Wesley, he must do for himself. So if Presbyters were wanted for the United States, he must make them, and having convinced himself from Lord King's *Account of the Primitive Church* that Bishops and Presbyters are the same order, he had no difficulty in laying hands on Dr. Coke, and transferring him from Presbyter of the Church of England into a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, and sending him over there to convert, by a threefold ordination in one day, Francis Asbury from a mere itinerant preacher into another Bishop of the same Church. The American Methodists, however, disliked the word Superintendent, and finding the word bishop in the New Testament, determined, as they put it, to be "Scriptural," and so called their beloved Asbury a "bishop," and have had "bishops" in place of superintendents ever since. Though John Wesley did not give him the name of bishop, he gave him the power of an archbishop, and made him primate of "the Methodist Episcopal Church in America," as he himself was primate of the

Wesleyan Methodist Connexion in England ; but while the Americans gave the name, they withheld the power. Asbury wisely determined "to submit to the will of a majority, and his unwillingness to exercise any power not delegated to him by his brother preachers deprived him of the power he exercised under the appointment of Wesley as general superintendent or assistant." I quote this from the American biography of Bishop Asbury, written by W. P. Strickland, who tells us how, knowing the little respect Americans had for authority they did not themselves confer, and how much their experience told them undelegated and uncontrolled power was liable to abuse, Asbury even refused to accept the episcopate at the hands of Wesley without the concurrence of his brethren ; and adds that "to him is to be ascribed the moderate episcopacy which has ever since characterised the Church. Our bishops now rarely, if ever, speak in Conference on any subject not immediately connected with their office, and never advance an opinion unless solicited by the action of the Conference, much less presume to decide questions of debate. We have known them even voted down when in the exercise of the only right they have in deciding questions of order. Their decisions of law are subject to quadrennial revision, and may be wholly set aside by the General Conference. They have not even the right which is allowed to every president and moderator of any and every ecclesiastical assembly with which we are acquainted, to vote on any question, however vital to Methodism."

Who could complain, even in these Radical days, of the Bishops in the House of Lords, if they were equally reticent of speech and authority ? Perhaps if John Wesley had lived to realise such a "falling off," he might have saved himself the pains of conditioning the doctrine of ecclesiastical succession with the history of Lord King, and carried out to its logical issue the answer he once made to a clerical complaint that no unordained person had a

right to act in any way as a minister of religion. That answer was to the effect that the right to act as a curer of souls was that of the right to act as a curer of the body—the evidence of the ability to cure ; and suggested to the probable demurrer, that the law did not allow an unlicensed and undiplomated medical practitioner to recover fees, the triumphant rejoinder that his curates charged no fees ; and that even on legal grounds a man might, if he were able, discharge the duties of a clergyman, if he did it for nothing. But when opportunity offered, he failed to carry such pleading to its logical issue, preferring to be an illogical Churchman rather than a logical Nonconformist ; so when the Scotch Wesleyans complained, as the Americans had done, that they were deprived of the sacraments because Mr. Wesley would not suffer the preachers, while free to the exercise of spiritual influence and power, to minister material ordinances, he ordained three of his itinerants, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, and J. Taylor, who had all three travelled the Old Black Country. For this assumption of episcopal function and authority he could not plead, as he did in the case of the United States, that the union between Church and State was dissolved, and that in so doing he violated “no order and invaded no man’s right,” and so he urged “that he never was connected with the Church of Scotland.” He might have added that he knew very little of what kept Scotchmen away from the Episcopal Church, or he would never have sent even his abridgment of the Book of Common Prayer with the three ministers he ordained to his Scotch followers. They received the ministers, but sent back the “Abridgment,” as their fathers had sent back “The Book.”

Two years after the ordination for Scotland Mr. Wesley proceeded to the ordination of three ministers for England, one of whom he made a bishop, or, as he preferred to call him, a superintendent.

There is no doubt that Mr. John Wesley proceeded to

this ordination for England with great reluctance, and was driven thereto by the requirement of his increasing followers to have the ordinances administered among themselves, and the strength of Mr. Wesley's convictions that none but ordained ministers should administer them. That the number anxious for such administration was not equal to the number of John Wesley's followers, and that they who so desired the administration of the sacraments by no means shared his views as to the need for their administration by ordained ministers only, is evident from what took place soon after Wesley's death. We have read how Mr. H. H. Fowler, now M.P., lecturing to the young men at Dar'ington Street, in 1858, told that "after Mr. Wesley's death, when it was evident that in the course of events, or rather, in the order of Providence, Methodism had become a distinct section of the Catholic Church, the Conference, in defining the regulations for public worship, enacted that wherever Divine service was performed in England on the Lord's Day in church hours, the officiating preacher should read either the service of the Established Church, Mr. Wesley's abridgment of the service, or, at least, the lessons appointed by the calendar; and the Conference added a strong recommendation in favour of the liturgical service." Then, as will be remembered from the further extracts I quoted in a former chapter, Mr. Fowler regretted at the time in question that the Conference did not make the use of the liturgy compulsory, and hoped the time would come when they would repair their fault. The fact is that the Conference would have imperilled the existence of the Connexion had they attempted anything of the kind, and even at this day Mr. Fowler represents the views of so small a minority of Wesleyans on this point that his hope is little likely to be realised. The Conference referred to by Mr. Fowler, so far from being engaged in recognising that "Methodism had become a distinct section of the Catholic Church," or "enacting" laws for its government as a separate and distinct



Church, was doing its best to strengthen the discouragement previous Conferences had given to all ecclesiastical and sacerdotal pretensions, and preventing such burning questions from destroying the fabric John Wesley had built up. For four years after Mr. Wesley's death the Connexion was agitated by the unsettled question of the administration of sacraments, some going for what was called at the first subsequent Conference "the Old Plan," viz., a *strict* connection with the National Church, and others wishing to have that plan so far extended as to comprehend what they termed "every Scriptural privilege." The former appear to have been the more numerous and the more influential among the members of societies, and the latter did not ask for formal separation from the Established Church or the erection of Methodism into a distinct and separate Church. The Conference of 1791 answered both parties with "We engage to follow strictly the plan which Mr. Wesley left us ;" but the answer was not satisfactory, and many petitions in favour of an extension of "the Old Plan," were presented to the next Conference in 1792, urging that "Mr. Wesley having been used to administer the Lord's Supper to the societies in his annual visits, the loss of this privilege was an additional inducement to those who contended for the more liberal plan ;" but several counter addresses from persons of considerable influence advised that the privilege should not be granted. The members of the Conference were so divided, and were so anxious to avoid separation or division in the Connexion, that they resolved to decide the question for a year only, and that by lot. The lot decided that the sacraments should not be administered in the societies for the next twelve months. During that time, however, the agitation increased, and the next Conference (that of 1793) was obliged to come to some determination on the question. After a long discussion it was decided by a very large majority that "the societies should have the privilege of the Lord's Supper where they unanimously desired it." Unani-

mity was required in order that, if possible, division should be prevented. To avoid offence it was at the same time resolved:—"1. That no gowns, cassocks, bands, or surplices should be worn by any of our preachers; 2. That the title of *reverend* should not be used by them towards each other in future; 3. That the distinction between ordained and unordained preachers should be dropped."

These three rules prevail to the present day; for though by general courtesy Wesleyan ministers, even in Wesleyan chapel announcements, receive the title Rev., no such title is prefixed to their names on the circuit Plans. That the third resolution should have so readily passed and remained unquestioned is remarkable as having, so soon after the death of John Wesley, reversed his views and his sense of order with respect to the administration of the sacraments. The explanation is to be found in the natural and logical result of the Wesleyan teaching—that salvation comes from what God works within a man, and not from anything that any man, however holy, or however set apart for holy office, can do or say outside a man. To one who believes this, outward ordinances, and by whom they may be or are to be administered, would be matter only of secondary importance. Where to know and to feel within the voice that alone can give assurance, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," are the great essentials, sacraments and sacramentarians must needs be more or less non-essential, except where earlier faith and earlier training have not made them religious habits, which have a tendency to take firmer hold than merely religious opinions.

Thus, then, naturally and logically, contrary to his will, and his want, and his wont, Wesleyanism reaped the harvest which John Wesley had sown. But in discarding all sacramentarianism and sacerdotalism, and leaving to the societies to deal as they pleased with the sacraments, the Conference did well to retain the name of "Connexion," for only in the sense of a Connexion or company of believers

in the existence of a salvation which only God can give can Methodism be a Church. As a community or institution having men within it who are the media, not the mere messengers, of such salvation, and who can withhold or take it away, neither highest Wesleyanism nor lowest Methodism can ever be a Church.

Practically, the difficulty was settled by the Conference of 1793, for "the Plan of Pacification" agreed to at the Conference of 1795 only carried out into detail the main principles previously decided upon, and made further regulations for the prevention of abuse. Thus a majority of the trustees, stewards, and leaders became competent to secure the distribution of the Lord's Supper, with the consent of the Conference, and upon the condition that it should be administered by those only whom Conference authorised; that it should be administered to members, and on Sunday evenings only, and "never be administered on those Sundays on which it is administered in the parochial church." Thus, so far from claiming that "Wesleyan Methodism had become a Church," the parish church was still recognised as the church of Wesleyans; and the direction quoted by Mr. Fowler for the order of worship among Wesleyans in church hours was that they should, as far as possible, do and say all that they would have said and done had they gone to church. But so much did, and do, Wesleyan Methodists prefer a Connexion to a Church, and a meeting house to a temple, that although the Wolverhampton Circuit received such a direction nearly ninety years ago, it is complied with in one of its chapels only, and that had to be built a few years ago for the purpose.

The Conference which in 1793 sought apostolically to deal with the sacramental questions by lot was presided over by the only bishop John Wesley ordained for England—Alexander Mather, who did such brave and good work in the metropolis of the Black Country in 1763, and who spent two years in the Staffordshire Circuit twelve years afterwards.

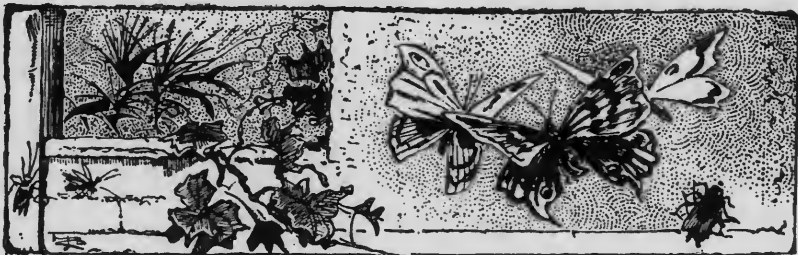
He afterwards travelled in the Birmingham Circuit, and sowed in the Old Black Country much good seed, which is still harvesting.

The intellectual side of the progress of Methodism in the Wolverhampton Circuit concerns more recent years. Thus, it speaks well for the circuit that the Young Men's Institute in Darlington Street, in connection with which Mr. Fowler delivered his lecture on Wesleyan Methodism, was the first institution of the kind started in connection with any religious body in the town and district, and if it is not alive now, its dissolution is due to the fact that the Free Library and its all-comprehensive teaching resources and lectures have swallowed up all such lesser institutions. Looking down a long list extending over many years of essays read and lectures delivered before its members, I am pleased to see such a variety and grasp of subject and thought prevailing among the young men of Darlington Street Chapel, and from the good use they seem to have made of the little library they formed among themselves, I have no doubt they are extensive travellers in the world of books the Free Library has opened up to them. The Wesleyan Methodists of Wolverhampton were, too, among the first to take part in that great work of elementary education which all the Churches felt at one time called upon to aid; and though the other Nonconformist Churches of the town have closed their schools since the advent of the School Board, the Wesleyans of Darlington Street Chapel still keep, and are likely to keep, their weekday schools open, and they are among the more flourishing elementary schools of the borough. The large and roomy schools were erected in 1858 at the back of the chapel, at a cost of £2,200, an admirable warming apparatus, that heats every room to any required degree, having been added at a cost of £160. Equally to the fore in the work of elementary education were the Wesleyans of Heath Town, where, in 1866, day schools were added to their chapel, at a cost of £750, and,

thanks to the intelligence, and skill, and devotion to duty of the master and mistress of the schools, Mr. and Mrs. Woodward, they are among the most useful and flourishing educational institutes of the neighbourhood. When the Wednesfield School Board was established it was found that these schools, and those attached to the churches of Wednesfield and Heath Town, were doing their work so inclusively and so well, without regard to sect or creed, that the only Board school required was one on a minor scale in Moseley Village. The two Wesleyan schools above named provide education for 1,200 scholars. Every chapel in the circuit has Sunday Schools in connection with it, and altogether they have about 3,000 scholars.

These facts and figures apply only to Wolverhampton Circuit as it now is, for twenty years ago the circuit of 1804 was split into two, one part going to Bilston, and the other remaining with Wolverhampton. Leaving Bilston for separate treatment, let me briefly show how this separation, so far from decreasing Wesleyan forces—material and monetary forces at all events—in the diminished Wolverhampton Circuit, seems to have largely tended to their development. The value of the trust property left to it at the time of the separation was £15,593, and the debt upon it was £5,440. The value of the circuit property now is £32,599, and the debt had been reduced to £580. The annual income from this property is about £1,000 a year—viz., seat rents, £700; rent of schools, houses, etc., 100 guineas; and from anniversary services and other sources, £200. The expenditure, including repairs, lighting and warming, etc., leaves a balance of about £240 towards the support of four travelling preachers, whose salaries and other expenses amount to about £1,200 a year. There are about as many members in the circuit, but Wesleyan chapels are much attended by people who are not members of the Connexion, and though the chapels of the circuit provide seats for upwards of 5,000, the trustees have made material preparations for

building new and enlarged chapels by the purchase of sites at Wednesfield, Whitmore Reans, and Springfields. What a great progress has thus been made since eighty years ago, when a few old-fashioned folks were proud of what could be got into "Noah's Ark," and into the "tin-pot" chapel of Can Lane !



## PART II.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### LIGHT AND DARK AT DARLASTON.

THOSE who have so far studied theology as to be acquainted with Archdeacon Paley's *a priori* argument for the existence of a Divine creative Intelligence, and the discussion to which it gave rise, will remember that it was objected, to the way in which the Archdeacon illustrated his argument, that, if a savage found a watch in the grass, he would, instead of going through the syllogistic process of reasoning laid down by the Archdeacon, come at once in his simplicity to the conclusion that it was a living animal of a kind to be avoided. If I am to trust a story communicated to *Notes and Queries* some years ago by Mr. J. Perry, this is actually what once took place in Darlaston.

The story runs that many years ago a gentleman paid a visit to Darlaston, and as he was rambling along a field at the outskirts of the town he unfortunately lost his watch—a “verge,” size extra large. The gentleman appears to have been unaware of his loss, and, as the story goes, “was never heard of any more.” A short time after the occur-

rence a party in passing across the field heard a ticking noise, which they could not comprehend the meaning of. Searching closely they found the subject of their curiosity, the watch; but blest ignorance dared them to touch it. They were frightened at the strange tick, and, instantly taking to their heels, made off to the town to apprise their good neighbours of the unaccountable phenomenon. After explaining the matter as well as their excited state would allow, their good neighbours were also called to see the curious object; so, gathering strength and courage by numbers, they marched—"a goodly host"—in the direction of the field. Upon arriving at their destination they each had a good look at the peculiar and mysterious turnip, but it was beyond their power of comprehension, or, as the narrator quaintly puts it, "it was afore their time." Towards evening nearly all the neighbours had been to have a "squeent," but nothing could be gleaned of what it really was. At last a good idea. "Send for Daddy" (the wise-acre of the town), but he, poor old gentleman, being too infirm to walk, had to be taken rather ingloriously in a wheelbarrow. When the vehicle and its contents reached the noisy assembly all voices were hushed, and room was immediately made for the inlet of the new arrival to where the watch was lying. After a time the old gentleman wished to be wheeled round the object of curiosity, and, his request being complied with, he said very slowly, "Wheel I round agin." This was done, then a stop, another listen, then a "Wheel I round agin." This was again done, and repeated, when their worthy oracle uttered in a lamentable and prophetic tone of voice, "It's un unking toaad! Luds! arm yoursel's wi' sticks an' stuns, fourr thar bea summat goin' f'appen t' Darlstun."

Here is another tale of primitive simplicity. One day a Darlastonian rambling in a meadow was incited to a gambol by some calves. He, mistaking their playful butting for an attack, took off his coat, and commenced a pugilistic en-



counter with the calves, which, more frightened than hurt, rushed bellowing for aid, as the man thought, to a bull in a neighbouring field. This was the note of defiance he sent after them: "Yah goany tell yer ode fayther um'll sarve un the saame."

This reckless readiness to fight bulls was a sign significant of Darlaston as long as bull-baiting could hold its own in "the Black Country." Of course, baiting a bull with dogs on Darlaston Green, instead of rashly provoking a bull with one's fists in a Darlaston field, was a great intellectual advance from primitive simplicity, but a great falling off from primitive innocence and morality, if I am to judge by a very old and yellow "New Song called Darlaston Wake Bull Baiting," I found in the Salt collection at Stafford.

Wesleyanism did a good work when it made Methodists of Darlaston miners a hundred and fifty years ago, and converted such of their "animal propensities" as took delight in combating and destruction in the cruel sports of the times and neighbourhood to moral and spiritual ends—to attack and subdue "sin and Satan," above all to combat and keep under as best they could the worst devil each man had to deal with—himself. And they went at it like bull-baiters. Mild pietists, with weak whiskers and small backs to their heads, whose *forte* is fêtes, not fisticuffs, and whose place in "the battle of life," as waged, at least, outside the churches, must ever be to the rear, not in the front, were scandalised at the "scenes" enacted at Wesleyan meetings in those days; as Wesleyan meetings, grown to churches now, are apt to be scandalised at the scenes enacted by Salvation Armies in these times. It was genuine "wrestling in prayer" then; those Primitive Wesleyans did believe in a personal devil without any manner of doubt, and when any praying pugilist gave him a knock-down blow, or got him into a corner and then pitched him over the ropes, how the shout went up!

But they did plenty of shouting the other way first. They

were not content at the outset with maltreating any poor Wesleyans that came to Darlaston, but they must needs go out to other places to find and persecute them. It was a Darlaston mob that assailed John Wesley at Wednesbury and carried him first before Justice Lane at Bentley, who would have nothing to do with him ; and then before Justice Persehouse at Walsall with equal non-effect on Thursday, the 20th of October, 1743. Judging by the length and picturesque vigour with which John Wesley has, in his Journal, himself recorded the occurrence, it must have made a deep impression upon his mind. It is strange to read, however, that throughout it was not from the mob of bull-baiters from unpolished Darlaston that the great English Churchman for the people stood in any danger, but from the men of the old and pretentious borough of Walsall.

A summary of John Wesley's narrative is well worth making. He had preached quietly enough in the morning to a great gathering in "The High Bullen," and he was writing at Francis Ward's in the afternoon "when the cry arose that the mob had beset the house." "We prayed that God would disperse them ; and it was so. One went this way and another that, so that in half an hour not a man was left." Then, adds Wesley, like a shrewd man and a pious man, too, not wishing to tempt Providence, "I told our brethren, 'Now is the time for us to go ;' but they pressed me exceedingly to stay. So, that I might not offend them, I sat down, though I foresaw what was to follow." Foreseeing all that did follow, it was an act of no small courage in Mr. Wesley to calmly take a seat that was soon to be so rudely disturbed. In a few moments the Darlaston mob, increased by local riff-raff, surrounded the house, clamouring, "Bring out the minister." All but Mr. Wesley were terrified enough. He records, "I desired one to take their captain by the hand, and bring him into the house. After a few sentences interchanged between us, the lion was become a lamb. I desired him to go and bring in one or two more

of the most angry of his companions. He brought in two, who were ready to swallow the ground with rage ; but in two minutes they were as calm as he. I then bade them make way, that I might go out among the people. As soon as I was in the midst of them, I called for a chair ; and, standing up, asked, 'What do any of you want with me?' Some said, 'We want you to go with us to the justice.' I replied, 'That I will, with all my heart.' I then spoke a few words, which God applied, so that they cried out with might and main, 'The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defence.' I asked, 'Shall we go to the justice to-night or in the morning?' Most of them cried, 'To-night, to-night,' on which I went before, and two or three hundred followed, the rest returning whence they came."

These good people, so strangely misled, and this great good man, who thus, with the grandeur of his mission and the dignity of his mind, unconsciously took the lead of those who had come to be his captors, set out in search of justice simply because they who misrepresented justice by administering Church and State under the Hanoverian succession on the plan of the Stuarts had commanded that he should be brought before them.

The command was as follows, and had been issued but a few days before :—

*"Staffordshire.*

"To all High Constables, Petty Constables, and other of his Majesty's Peace Officers within the said county, and particularly to the Constable of Tipton (near Walsall).

"Whereas we, his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said county of Stafford, have received information that several disorderly persons, styling themselves Methodist preachers, go about raising routs and riots, to the great damage of his Majesty's liege people, and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King ;

"These are, in his Majesty's name, to command you, and every

one of you, within your respective districts, to make diligent search after the said Methodist preachers, and to bring him or them before some of us, his said Majesty's Justices of the Peace, to be examined concerning their unlawful doings.

"Given under our hands and seals this — day of October, 1743.

"J. LANE.

"W. PERSEHOUSE."

As Mr. Lane's name stood first, it was to his house, Bentley Hall, two miles off, on the road between Willenhall and Walsall, that this historic procession proceeded. "One or two," records Mr. Wesley, "ran before to tell Mr. Lane that they had brought Mr. Wesley before his Worship." Mr. Lane's astonishing reply was, "What have I to do with Mr. Wesley? Go and carry him back again." As this conclusion spoke of the rev. gentleman as though he had been a bale of goods or a truss of hay, it could not have been arrived at out of respect to Mr. Wesley, and we might have been left in doubt as to the reason for such a strange commentary by Mr. Justice Lane on his own rather regally worded proclamation, had not the main body of Mr. Wesley's strangely gathered "followers" come up, knocked at the door, and been told by a servant that—"Justice had gone to bed!"

The good people could not understand how Justice could be either blind or asleep when required to be on duty. So they continued their knocking, and brought the son of Mr. Justice to the door, who asked what was the matter. One replied, "Why, an't please you, they sing psalms all day; nay, and make folks rise at five in the morning. And what would your Worship advise us to do?" "To go home," was the answer.

Ere following the puzzled mob let us contemplate the picture presented by this march to Bentley Hall, and this inglorious kicking of the heels in the courtyard of justice, contrasted with another scene which Bentley Hall and the road to it presented when Charles II. slunk as best he could

from oaken chamber in open air at Boscobel to anywhere, anywhere away from the people, and their justice so terribly stern to peccant kings. He came disguised in servile raiment. There was no disguise about John Wesley. Charles fled from the people who followed him because they clamoured for his liberty and his life ; John Wesley met the people, and went before them, fearing no law or justice. The ancestor of this same Justice Lane received the monarch, and, true to his loyal conscience, nobly risked his own head to rescue his prince from such law and justice as overtook his father. The degenerate Lane of that house at Bentley, when John Wesley, whom he had ordered to be brought, came voluntarily to his door, was true to nothing but his bed, and from between the sheets surlily belied his own proclamation. What a picture does not this epoch in the lives of priest and prince at Bentley Hall present to the painter, and how historian, philosopher, and statesman might draw useful lessons from it for the future !

But let us return. What could the poor mob, thus scouted by Mr. Justice Lane, do but go to his partner in the wretched business, Mr. Persehouse ? He lived at Walsall, and thither Mr. Wesley and his undisciplined followers went, but there, too, "Justice was asleep," and could not be disturbed. I give the way in which John Wesley puts what followed. "Now they were at a stand again, but at last they all thought it their wisest course to make the best of their way home. About fifty of them undertook to convoy me, but we had not gone one hundred yards when the mob of Walsall came pouring in like a flood and bore down all before them. The Darlaston mob made what defence they could, but they were weary as well as outnumbered, so that in a short time many being knocked down, the rest ran away and left me in their hands." He sets forth, too, how that Walsall mob raged around him "like the roaring of the sea ;" how they cried, "Knock his brains out, kill him at once ;" how he went in danger of

his life ; how " a poor woman of Darlaston, who had headed that mob, and sworn that none should touch me, when she saw her followers give way, ran into the thickest of the throng and knocked down three or four men one after another." She was only saved from death, like the hero whom she championed, by the majesty of mien and manner, spirit and voice, which at length won the most outrageous to his defence, and set him safely on his way back to Wednesbury.

"From the beginning to the end," writes Mr. Wesley, "I found the same presence of mind as if I had been sitting in my own study. But I took no thought for one moment before another. Only once it came into my mind that if they should throw me into the river it would spoil the papers that were in my pocket. For myself, I did not doubt but I should swim across, having but a thin coat and a light pair of boots."

Yet this very treatment of John Wesley by the Darlaston mobs, as by the mobs that everywhere met him at first in the Old Black Country, is evidence that the besotted and disorderly of Darlaston were bad, not base. To persist in an attack upon a man, who, from what would appear to them some derangement of moral or intellectual and moral vision, was incapable of their notion of defence or attack, was as repugnant to their nature as to continue baiting the blind bull of which I have already told the story ; while they recognised the boldness that fled from no attack, quailed from no blow, yet never returned it, and went towering and triumphantly on amid the barking and the snapping of the worldly dogs it would neither toss nor worry, as a courage greater than their own.

Recognition went on to admiration, and ended, as we shall find, in imitation.



## CHAPTER II.

### WESLEYANISM AT DARLASTON.

**B**EFORE Darlaston settled down to the work of imitating Wesley it completed the work of opposing him and his followers, and three months after the memorable escape of John Wesley recounted in the preceding sketch matters were brought to a very dangerous crisis.

On Monday, January 23rd, 1744, a large mob fell foul of a few Wesleyans as they were going to hear preaching at Wednesbury. Among the persecuted were John Constable and his wife. Some of the mob, according to the account sent to John Wesley by James Jones, threw Mrs. Constable down, "and five or six held her down, that another might force her. But she continued to resist, till they changed their purpose, beat her much, and went away." On the following Monday "the mob gathered again, broke into John Constable's house, pulled part of it down, broke some of his goods in pieces, and carried the rest away, particularly all his shop goods, to a considerable value. But, not satisfied with this, they sought" their owners, "swearing they would knock their brains out. Their little children, mean time, as well as themselves, wandered up and down, no one daring to relieve or take them in, lest they should hazard their own lives."

The next day the mob mustered to the extent of a

hundred, at Wednesbury, under the shadow of the church whose minister, Mr. Eggington, was a fierce denouncer of Methodism; but, "hearing some of Wednesbury were resolved to defend themselves, they dispersed for that time," and, it would seem, for the next day, too; for on Wednesday, February 1st, Charles Wesley preached at Wednesbury, and "the whole congregation was quiet and attentive, nor had we any noise or interruption." There was a fierce storm, however, the Monday after. The Methodists had received warning of the foul weather that was about to burst upon them, and James Jones, returning to Wednesbury from accompanying Charles Wesley on his way from the town, "found the society met together and commending themselves to God in prayer, having been informed that many, both at Darlaston and other places, had bound themselves by an oath to come on Shrove Tuesday (the next day) and plunder all the Methodists in Wednesbury." The mob did not wait till next day, but began the work of destruction before the Methodists could finish their prayers. Jones says: "I immediately retired to my father's house, but he did not dare to receive me. Nor did any one else, till at length Henry Parks took me in, whence early in the morning I went to Birmingham."

All night the storm gathered, and with cockcrow that Shrove Tuesday burst upon the heads and houses of the poor Wesleyans of Wednesbury. It broke all the windows of all the houses of all the Methodists so effectually that neither glass, lead, nor frame remained. Doors were burst open, and through window or door, as appeared readiest, the plundering rascals "made their way in; and all the tables, chairs, chests of drawers, with whatever was not easily removable, they dashed in pieces, particularly shop goods and furniture of every kind. What they could not well break, as feather beds, they cut in pieces, and strewed about the room." No consideration spared their cruel hands. "William Sitch's wife was lying-in, but that was all one;



they pulled away her bed too, and cut it in pieces." The mob met with no resistance from the Methodists. "Indeed, most part, both men and women, fled for their lives; *only the children stayed, not knowing whither to go.*" Was ever line of history more touchingly unadorned in its pure and simple eloquence than these concluding words?

Whatever might be the brutal fanaticism of those who stirred them on, the mob was one of no mere Church fanatics or religious persecutors, but consisted largely of thieves and ruffians. Robbery prevailed on all hands, "wearing apparel, and things that were of value, or easily saleable, they carried away, every man loading himself with as much as he could well carry of whatever he liked best." They found the pastime thus provided for them so profitable that, having cleared out the Wesleyans of Wednesbury on Shrove Tuesday, they, on Ash Wednesday, divided themselves into several companies, and plundered the Wesleyans of surrounding villages.

Dr. Wilkes, looking on previous riots from the distant point of Willenhall, thus describes what he saw, or what others saw for him. He dates his note of the occurrences he describes, "June 12th, 1743," and says: "The Methodists having this spring begun to preach at Wednesbury and Darlaston, at the request of the Lady Huntingdon, who sent here the Wesleys, Charles and John, some of them at Darlaston, on Sunday, the 12th, fell down in the church, made unusual noises, and, like the French prophets in Queen Anne's time, pretended to receive the Holy Ghost. This caused a mob to arise, who broke the windows of the house where they assembled to preach and sing psalms. The next day some of the mob being brought by a warrant before Justice Persehouse, of Reynold's Hall, he reprimanded the Methodists. On this day they were greatly mobbed, and glad to get off as well as they could. On the 20th the mob were at Wednesbury and Darlaston, broke the windows of every Methodist's house, and did much mischief, and con-

tinually rambled about all the week, crying out against them, and threatening what they would do to all such as joined with and followed them. These Methodists affright the people by preaching damnation to them, cause them to neglect their labour, and do great mischief in this populous part of the kingdom."

Perhaps the most amusing account of the later riots, judged by its excessive perversion of fact, was that which appeared in the *Whitehall and London Evening Post*, of February 18th, 1744, as follows: "By a private letter from Staffordshire, we have advice of an insurrection of the people called Methodists, who, upon some pretended insults from the Church party, have assembled themselves in a riotous manner, and, having committed several outrages, they proceeded at last to burn the house of one of their adversaries."

If there was any party to blame, it must have been that party in the Church of those days which objected to a minister of the Church going out into the highways and byeways, and compelling the people who never went to church to come in. This seems pretty evident, from the description given of the means taken to bring the Shrove Tuesday riots and excesses to an end. "Some of the gentlemen who had set the mob to work, or threatened to turn away collier or miner out of their service that did not come and do his part, now drew up a paper for those of the Society to sign, importing that they would never invite or receive any Methodist preacher more. On this condition they told them they would stop the mob at once; otherwise they must take what followed. This they offered to several, but they declared, one and all, 'We have already lost all our goods; and nothing more can follow, but the loss of our lives, which we will lose too, rather than wrong our consciences.'" James Jones, who records this, as quoted by Mr. Wesley in his Journal, also tells how a Mr. Wood, of those days, of Wednesbury, promised several of the despoiled Wesleyans "they should have what could

be found of their goods, on condition they would promise not to receive or hear those preachers any more."

The mildness of the invective in the following entry, under date February 18th, 1744, in Mr. John Wesley's Journal, is evidence of the truth of the facts which it records: "Ever since the 20th of last June the mob of Walsall, Darlaston, and Wednesbury, hired for that purpose by their betters, have broke open their poor neighbours' houses at their pleasure, by night and by day; extorted money from the few that had it; took away or destroyed their victuals and goods; beat and wounded their bodies; threatened their lives; abused their women (some in a manner too horrible to name), and openly declared they would destroy every Methodist in the country: the Christian country where his Majesty's innocent and loyal subjects have been so treated for eight months; and are now, by their wanton persecutors, publicly branded for rioters and incendiaries!"

According to "Memoirs of John Wesley, and a History of Methodism," by John Hampson, A.B., published in 1791, it was, at length, by royal order, notified to Mr. Wesley that on any complaint he or his followers might make, justice should be done them, and the writer adds, "The royal mandate was by no means premature. It was become absolutely necessary that something should be done to quell the increasing tumult. Of this necessity even the enemies of Methodism were made sensible. In Staffordshire the mob turned upon their employers, and threatened, unless they gave them money, to serve them as they had done the Methodists. To such a pitch had their brutality arrived, that if they saw a stranger whose appearance they disliked they immediately attacked him. A Quaker happening to ride through Wednesbury, they swore he was a preacher, pulled him off his horse, dragged him to a coal pit, and were, with difficulty, prevented from throwing him in. But this gentleman, not so attached to his principles as to refuse the protection of the laws, prosecuted them at

the Assizes, and from that time the tumults in Staffordshire subsided."

One can easily understand how in this way the persecution, as a matter of safety to those who had raised it, came to an end at last in Darlaston as elsewhere, and how there, more than anywhere else, left to the development of the example set it by John Wesley himself, Methodism not only flourished, but found some of its more enterprising professors and humble but useful home missionaries, who carried the Gospel of "peace on earth and good will among men" into the surrounding towns and villages as courageously and as perseveringly as their misguided fathers had once carried terror to affright the souls of the followers of John Wesley.

Mrs. Constable suffered to the day of her death from the effects of her ill-treatment at the hands of the mob in 1744. But her sufferings and the memory of their cause only stimulated her exertions to rescue those around her from the brutality that had so nearly deprived her of life, and when she died she left behind her a daughter—Mrs. Thomas Bailey—who never wearied in well-doing. Mrs. Bailey was a member of the Darlaston Society of Wesleyan Methodists for seventy-three years, and was honoured by the personal friendship of Mr. Wesley, who never came to Darlaston without calling to see her. He equally honoured her husband, whom he himself made a steward of Darlaston Chapel.

Among the older and more noted members of the Darlaston Society were Edward and Daniel Bagnall, relatives of Mrs. Thomas Bailey. But Methodism could not have been said to have triumphed in Darlaston if it had not boasted the conversion and the support of a Wilkes, for Darlaston is noted for Wilkes's.

The Methodist Wilkes, of Darlaston, was a John Wilkes, better known for the greater part of his life, in consideration of the wealth that followed his hard struggle for it, as

"Gentleman John Wilkes." He was ever hampered with a desire to exercise another gift, which his superiors in the Church believed he had never received—that of preaching. He had no doubt about the matter himself, so, pending "a call" from "the Church," he built a chapel at the back of his house, and, naming it "Bethel," called, with large bell hung in little steeple, Darlaston to hear him every Sunday afternoon. Darlaston went for a time out of curiosity, and gave signs of merriment when he would be pathetic. "There's that sermon of mine on Joseph—it's enough to move the heart of a stone, but the hearts of the people here are harder than stone, for they only laugh when I preach it." So Gentleman John Wilkes eventually closed the chapel.

But though not a preacher, he was proud to be the patron and teacher of preachers, and was famous for years for the annual address and feast he gave to Methodist local preachers, who always admired the feast, whatever they thought of the address. They were ever welcome to the best his house could afford when they were preaching in its neighbourhood. One Sunday one who still lives and preaches met at Gentleman Wilkes's house the Williams who first built a chapel in Hell Lane, and John Wilkes thus boasted of his humility while "Sally" was getting the tea: "When I began to seek the Lord I thought I was not humble enough, and I said, 'What shall I do to get humbler?' and a voice said to me, 'Go and pray in the cellar.' That was not enough, and another voice said, 'Go and pray in the little house.' That was not low and mean enough, and again a voice said, 'Go and pray in the pigstye.' I went, and among the pigs I found the Lord. Didst thee ever feel in that way, brother Williams?" Brother Williams could not exactly say he had. "Then thee bean't converted," was the unhesitating fraternal condemnation.

But if he was proud of the humility that led to his conversion, he grieved sorely at the want of faith which pre-

vented his translation to the other world without seeing death, and would tell how once, assured of his fitness for immediate translation, he went out into a field and awaited the descent of the cloud that would bear him to the heavens above. There was the cloud, but it would not descend. Thinking that, with his feet to the ground, it was the earth that kept him from heaven, he climbed a tree, and was astounded at a scornful laugh that followed him. Looking down he saw the devil grinning at him, saying, "O, so you thought the Lord could not raise you from the earth, and that you would be nearer heaven up a tree. Where's your faith? You're lost now." Down the tree came Gentleman Wilkes, and it was some time before he recovered his humility and his pride.

Though we shall see when we come to look at the religious growth of Willenhall that its Wesleyanism was carried thither from Darlaston, the latter place became more especially the head centre in "the Black Country" of Primitive Methodism, so named, I suppose, because as the offspring of Wesleyanism it claimed, as offsprings are apt to do, to be older and wiser than its own parent.

The child had an easier time of it than the parent. Wesleyanism had fought sturdily for many years, and had beaten down all fierce opposition and won much sympathy for the growing family of Methodist missionaries.

The first Primitive Methodist missionaries to Darlaston came there from the neighbourhood of Walsall Wood. They formed a fervent band of four men, and must have been of the higher working class of those days, if of that class at all, for they wore the dress coat of the times, top hats, and carried walking sticks. That all this was out of the common at Darlaston was manifest from the eagerness with which a native damsel rushed home to her mother, exclaiming, "Well, father is talking to some strange-looking men." "What sort of men are they?" asked the mother. "Well," replied the daughter, "they've got on pot lid hats,



"I WENT, AND AMONG THE PIGS I FOUND THE LORD."—P. 153.

flitch of bacon tail coats, hob-nailed shoes, and have mop-stales for walking sticks."

The herald who thus announced the advent of the Primitive Methodists to Darlaston was a daughter of David Bowen, who was at that time a Wesleyan local preacher, but one whom those Wesleyans who had lost the more demonstrative spirit of their forefathers regarded as having too much fervour and too little discretion. David was enraptured with the pitch of the voice and the sweep of the arm with which these four apostles of the new Methodist sect called and swept the good to the right and the evil to the left; and when because of starting too high their voices broke down, he lent their theme the aid of his strong lungs, and the sweep of his stout arm. Soon afterwards he became the first Darlaston preacher of Primitive Methodism, the greater freedom of which, as compared with the more restrained forces into which Wesleyanism had withdrawn, was better suited to the Darlaston temper. From Darlaston there soon went forth volunteer missionaries into all parts of the Black Country. They *would* be heard. No distance and no opposition could daunt, and soon old Walsall, big Wolverhampton, neighbouring Wednesbury, and lesser places, formed a circuit of Primitive Methodism of which Darlaston was the head and centre for many years; and, although its dimensions have since been circumscribed, Darlaston Circuit still retains Walsall and Wednesbury within its bounds, and Primitive Methodism has a larger chapel and a more numerous society at Darlaston than anywhere else—at all events, in the southern half of the county of Staffordshire.

Among the earlier workers in the useful cause David Bowen was long conspicuous, and "Old Frank Umbridge," who grew blind in the work, for years took many a text from the rich stores he had garnered into his memory from the Scriptures, and many ears still thrill at the memory of the strong voice calling aloud in street, field, or pulpit, "Bring heither the fatted calf." Bonser, too, is a name that



will not soon be forgotten among the Primitive Methodists of Darlaston. The owner, in his earlier preaching career, was conducting a prayer and revival meeting at the close of a more than usually exciting service, when, amid the wails of despairing and the rejoicing of saved sinners, he noticed the struggles of a collier to speak, whose utterances were confined to groans. "Pray, man, pray," urged Bonser. "O, I canna—canna pray," said the collier, with a scared look and husky voice. "Yer must, and yer shall," exclaimed Bonser. "Say after me," and, in a voice that compelled imitation, Bonser slowly gave utterance to a short but fervid and soul-stirring prayer. The collier repeated it word by word as it was uttered, and went home comforted, but had not, in Methodist parlance, "found peace," and could so ill rest in bed that long before even the early hour at which he must start for the pit and his work, his calls for forgiveness and mercy from Heaven disturbed his neighbours, and his shout of "Glory!" and "Hallelujah!" as he went forth rejoicing to his work was vividly recalled when about mid-day his mangled remains were borne up the streets to his home. He had been crushed to death beyond recognition by a fall of coal in the part of the pit where he was at work.

New Connexion Methodism found a home for a while at Darlaston, but it was only a small and obscure one, and the place knows it no longer. Independency has struggled long with a small chapel and a weak "church," but Wesleyanism and Primitive Methodism have ever absorbed the great bulk of Nonconformists in Darlaston.



### CHAPTER III.

#### WILLENHALL DISSENT AND NONCONFORMITY.

SO far as I have yet been able to learn, Dissent came to Willenhall from Coseley, and the first chapel that spread Nonconformist light in the township did it with light brought from Darkhouse Chapel. The first Willenhall Baptist Chapel was a very small one, and stood on the site now occupied by the larger chapel at Little London. There was no resident ministry for many long years, pious laymen walking Sunday after Sunday from and back to Coseley. A grandfather of Mr. Wassal, solicitor and clerk to the Bilston Commissioners, thus laboured at his work all the week and ministered at the Little London Chapel up to the year 1840, and there are some good old Baptists who love to recall his patriarchal looks, and his speech and his life so calm, modest, serene, impressive, and pure. There were good men on the spot who had a kind of oversight of the flock during the week, and would gather its members together periodically at prayer meetings. In the very early days of the chapel it was the practice for all but he who prayed to stand, the one who offered the prayer being the only suppliant upon his knees. If the prayer became lengthy, as was generally the case, taking the form of an address to Him Who was supplicated, or an admonition to those for whom the supplication was made, the position,

both to kneeling leader and standing followers, added much penance to long prayer. On one occasion it proved too much for the leader. He commenced dreamily and proceeded drearily for some twenty or five-and-twenty minutes, and then his voice lowered, the sentences became broken and detached, and their sense so obscure as to be difficult to catch. Then words ceased, and were succeeded by a conflict of nasal and guttural sounds, and the meeting, thus stimulated by its ears, opened its eyes, and found their leader had fallen into a troubled sleep upon his knees.

Methodism entered Willenhall from Darlaston by way of Monmore Lane, where three roads to and from Willenhall meet. In the open space where the roads converged was a large boulder stone that formed a platform or pulpit for the preachers from Darlaston, one of whom christened it "the Gospel stone." Once or oftener each Sunday a Methodist open-air service was held there, and thither Willenhall people would flock to hear what the Darlaston "Methodist babblers" had to say. When winter came one of their admirers, who lived in Ten House Row, opened his house for preaching, and prayer and class meetings. This first home of Methodism in Willenhall is still in existence, and is now the property of Mr. Josiah Tildesley. Thither the converts came for prayer meeting on Sunday mornings as early as seven o'clock; to preaching in the afternoon, and on one of the week night evenings to class meeting. In this little house there was formed the nucleus of the Methodist congregations of Willenhall, which now number five. In a short time the members who came to the services in the house outgrew its accommodation, and a farmhouse near Hell End was opened by its occupants for the meetings of neighbouring Methodists, a large kitchen of about four times the capacity of the meeting room in Ten House Row being the preaching place. Here class meetings were regularly held, but the leaders as well as preachers continued to be supplied from Darlaston.

The Methodist cause thus humbly begun was eventually strengthened by attracting to itself evangelically-minded Churchfolks who had been forced to go to church at Darlaston on Sunday mornings, and invited their neighbours to Scripture reading and prayer in their own houses on Sunday evenings. Among the more notable of such examples was Thomas Tildesley, to whom the more prominent of the Tildesleys of Willenhall trace their descent. I say the more prominent, because Willenhall has been favourable to the growth of Tildesleys, and it would be well for a person sending by post a private communication to any one Mr. Tildesley of Willenhall with which he did not want another Tildesley to become acquainted, to first make sure of the Christian name and the exact address of the Mr. Tildesley with whom he sought to communicate. Let the writer, for example, not carelessly affix the initial "J" to the surname, as there were years ago no fewer than fourteen Tildesleys in Willenhall whose Christian name commenced with that letter ;—three Jeffreys, three Josephs, two Johns, two Josiahs, three James's, and one Jesse. By how many these might have multiplied since may be guessed at by the number of Tildesleys whom the first of the name, so far as the memory of the oldest inhabitant serves, planted in the township. The Thomas of whom I am writing was not that Primitive Tildesley. He was the son of one of that name who had four sons. Those four sons were all adopted and educated by an uncle, who was a lockmaker, and an aunt who was the father's sister. The eldest, Samuel, remained with the uncle and aunt as long as they lived ; two others went to learn a trade and get a living at Birmingham, and Thomas, the youngest, was apprenticed to a shoemaker at Willenhall, eventually adding huckstering in a shop in the Market Place, opposite the Bell, to his Crispin craft, and for a time playing " mine host " at a public-house at Hell End, previously kept by a Mr. Horton, better known by his customers as "Chopsey," whose daughter, Violetta,

Thomas Tildesley had married. The marriage was a fruitful one, producing four sons and seven daughters. The sons have been more or less well known in this generation as Henry, Thomas, Josiah, and James. Henry became an iron merchant, Thomas a tailor and woollendrapery, Josiah a linendrapery, and James was apprenticed to a merchant or factor at Walsall. When the latter married a Miss Carpenter, he joined his brother-in-law and cousin Isaac Tildesley, a son of Samuel Tildesley, in a factoring business in Willenhall, which the latter transferred to them. When that partnership was dissolved by the retirement of Mr. Isaac Tildesley, Mr. James Tildesley continued the mercantile business on his own account for about twelve years longer, but about the year 1846 added to it the business of an iron foundry, erecting works at Summerford Brook for that purpose. The double business was managed for him by his nephew, Mr. John Harper, for many years, who, in 1850 or 1851, in partnership with Mr. Matthew Tildesley, the youngest son of Mr. Samuel Tildesley, purchased the business, which, established in 1790, still flourishes as the Albion Works, under the sole proprietary and direction of Mr. John Harper, and he, by the skill and taste he has lately brought to bear on the casting of iron for ornamental purposes, bids fair to give the business a yet longer lease of prosperous life.

For some time before he retired from the Albion Works, Mr. James Tildesley had devoted himself to the lockmaking business of his father-in-law, Mr. Carpenter, who at his death left it to his son and son-in-law, and the business, one of the first large lock manufactories in Willenhall, is still carried on by the firm of Carpenter & Tildesley.

All these Tildesleys became prominent Methodists, and Methodism first came into the family with the eldest of the seven daughters of old Thomas Tildesley, shoemaker and huckster, of the Market Place, Willenhall. Her father, meanwhile, faithful to the Church so unfaithful to Willen-

hall, was among the most diligent of Bible readers on Sunday evenings during the first decade of the present century. He was thus far a bit of a Methodist, and was also a bit of a wag, for, when one Sunday evening he was reading Paul's advice to the married members of the Church at Colosse, he quietly stopped and looked at one of his audience, a married woman, from Bell Alley, over the way, when he had read, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands," and her husband, who was present, looked at her, too, saying, "Nance, dost thee hear that?" Nance vouchsafed no sign that she had heard either Paul or her husband, and Mr. Thomas Tildesley proceeded with his reading, but stopped again when he had read the counter charge, "Husbands, love your wives," for he had no sooner done so than Nancy sprang to her feet, and in the twinkling of an eye seized her husband by the hair of the head, and, having brought the head to the ground, banged it thereon, with all her force, exclaiming, "Didst thee hear that?"

As may well be supposed, this episode somewhat interfered with the devotional character of the meeting, yet it served to establish another of the same apostle's statements, that "all things are profitable," for it helped to bring both families, that of the Bible reader and that of him to whom Paul's lesson on matrimony was so strikingly read, to Methodism, and both also attained more or less to wealth and consideration in this world. Nancy and her husband had a daughter who went with Thomas Tildesley's daughter to the Methodist services, and they induced the old folks to go, and their houses in Willenhall became, as long as they lived, stopping places for the travelling or local preacher. The children and grandchildren of the two families may be counted by scores in Willenhall, while several of the descendants of Nancy are living in affluence in other parts of the kingdom. Old Thomas Tildesley died, in his sixty-ninth year, on February 3rd, 1837, having been a Wesleyan twenty-seven years.

An effort was made to build a Methodist Chapel in Willenhall, and it succeeded. The site was that of the present Wesleyan day schools, to which was attached a parcel of ground wherein a goodly number of early Methodists found a peaceful and honoured grave. It was not, however, until 1830 that Willenhall was favoured with a resident "travelling preacher" of the Wesleyan ministry, forming part of a circuit that comprised Walsall, Wednesbury, and Darlaston, now grown into several circuits, and employing twelve ministers. The father of Mr. Waddy, Q.C. and M.P., was twice stationed in the circuit; and yet no ability or eloquence that ever came among them led the old Wesleyans of Willenhall ever to forget how much they were indebted to the faith and earnestness of Foster, Wilkes, Rubery, Silcock, Bowen, Banks, and others, who first brought Methodism from Darlaston to Willenhall.

When the Wesleyans of Willenhall grew so important as to need a resident minister among them, the Wesleyan Conference sent them the Rev. Thomas Capp, and then his flock discovered that the chapel was growing too small for them. The younger members said they must have a new and larger building, but the elders said it could not be done until they had paid off a debt of £800 on the old one. The young financiers thought that would be too long to wait, and there being an eligible plot of land adjoining the old chapel, they met and resolved on the ways and means of purchasing the land, and building thereon a large and commodious structure, transferring to the new chapel the debt of the old. The poorer worshippers showed their resolution by putting their names down for sums which were to be paid by periodical instalments extending over two years, and they showed their faith by affixing the amounts to be looked for from the more wealthy, Mr. John Read being elected treasurer in his absence, and the sum of £200 being appended to his name on the subscription list. When the proposition and expectation were read to

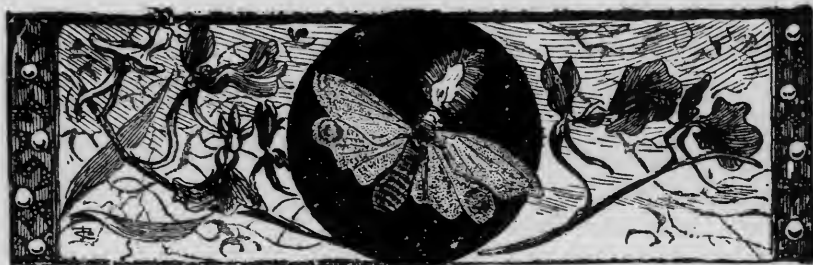
him, John Read shook his head ; but, his heart being warm with Methodism, he agreed thus far :—He would receive for safe custody any subscriptions they brought, and to every £80 he would add £20. This was a generosity tempered by prudence which excited the faith and trust of others, for John Read was much trusted, and had given good evidence of his trustworthiness. He found, however, that they who had put his name down for £200 had accurately gauged his responsibility according to the measure he had himself set up ; for he had so many eighties of pounds calling for twenties to make them hundreds as made up the wished for £200 of his own money. So the new chapel was built, and the old one became the present school. The Wesleyans had been the first in Willenhall to have a Sunday School, and nothing so tended to increase their numbers and to bring material help from even those who had no disposition to Methodism as the anniversary services of the Sunday Schools, of which the hymn singing of the children in procession through the town was not the least moving part of the anniversary.

Wesleyanism was not confined to Willenhall proper. It first put up a small chapel and then a larger one at Short Heath, and did the same at Portobello, where it first began to flourish in 1838. It erected the Walsall Road Chapel in 1865, and subsequently established a cause in another chapel on Spring Bank. To each it added a Sunday School, so that that branch of Methodism called Wesleyanism has now five chapels and five Sunday Schools and one resident minister in Willenhall. The two other branches of the Methodist family have not flourished there to the same extent. Primitive Methodism made a beginning in Monmore Lane, and thence progressed to Little London, but met with little success until the late Thomas Pearson brought about the erection of the British Schools, which were used on Sundays as a Primitive Methodist Chapel. Debt and difficulty ultimately closed the building both to school and



chapel; but the Primitives erected their present large chapel, where they are doing good work, under the pastorate of a stationed minister. They have two other chapels in the township.

The seceders during the Wesleyan Reform Movement of 1849-50 built a chapel in Willenhall, and then collapsed, the new chapel being taken and being still occupied by the New Connexion Methodists. It speaks well for the liberality of Willenhall Wesleyans that Mr. John Harper sold the Reformers the site of the chapel at a nominal price, gave them ten thousand bricks towards the structure, and presided at a monster meeting on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone, and was yet allowed to retain his position with the old body. The New Connexion Methodists have never flourished in Willenhall, and help but feebly to swell the triumph of Methodism where it now boasts nine chapels—five Wesleyan, three Primitive Methodist, and one New Connexion.



## CHAPTER IV.

### WESLEYAN METHODISTS AT BILSTON.

AS elsewhere in the Black Country, the evangelising of the masses in Bilston was for long years left to the Methodists, beginning with John Wesley and his more immediate followers in this part of the country. Frequently, when he journeyed to Birmingham and Wednesbury, John Wesley visited Bilston, and, though not mobbed to the extent of his maltreatment at Wednesbury and Walsall, he had anything but a pleasant time of it, and on one of the two visits he records in his Journal he had at least one "bad quarter of an hour," as the French term it. The first visit he so notes was made on October 2nd, 1745, and then the material seemed to have been worse than the moral aspect of the place. The road from Wednesbury to Bilston seems for a main road over which the mail travelled to have been in an execrable condition, and one in which only John Wesley could have "stuck" without swearing. He writes: "It was exceedingly dark when we rode on to Bilston. However, we did not stick fast till we got into the Wednesbury Road. Several coming with candles I got out of the quagmire, and leaving them to disengage my horse, walked to Francis Ward's, where I preached." From the absence of all record to the contrary, it may be taken that he did so in peace. Not so, on the occasion of his next recorded visit, on March 21st, 1770, when he

preached in the house of John Fereday, an old-fashioned dwelling that once stood at the south end of Wood Street, for during the service a mob gathered in the street, and hooting and howling preluded a determined attack on the premises. This brought the courageous Wesley to the door, and he was soon surrounded by a hostile gathering, while flying missiles hit several of his followers. The veteran was, as usual, cool and undaunted. No one could look him in the face and strike him. One fellow rushed to his side, and his fist was about to execute his shouting threat when Mr. Wesley turned to him, saying, "If I have done thee harm, strike, man!" and the arm fell to the man's side, and he slunk away. Another struck at him behind his back, but the blow was turned aside by one of the Bilston Wesleyans, and the mob, its leaders growing ashamed of its violence, soon separated.

After this the cause prospered more, though still for several years its dimensions were no larger than could be accommodated in private houses, mainly of a humble character. One of these houses was the residence of Peggy Taylor, where "a class" met weekly. Peggy kept a small shop, chiefly devoted to the retailing of "suck" in its then popular and primitive form of "penny-an-ounce," consisting of boiled sugar, conditioned by treacle, and flavoured with mint, horehound, or other herbs, which, cooled into round brown cakes, were the temptation Peggy put in the way of the rising generation to that enjoyment of the carnal appetites which she strongly reprobated in their elders. Could it have occurred to Peggy to make her business a case of conscience, she might never have sold "suck" in Temple Street. But her whole attention was absorbed by the daring desire for a Wesleyan chapel. There was already a Dissenting chapel in that extension of the old town which, being an extension, got the name of "new." But then, it was not a Methodist chapel. There might be light there, but there was no heat, and Methodists of those

days liked their religion warm. That chapel gave a name to the thoroughfare in which it was erected, for it was called Meeting Street. Its pulpit was supplied by preachers from Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. In 1780 the congregation became divided into two parties, the one wishing to remain where they were, and the other desiring a new structure nearer to the more populous part of the township. Not being able to agree, the latter swarmed off, and made a new hive, where Baptists are still busy in Wood Street, struggling against the decline of Calvinism.

To return to Peggy. She was bent upon having a chapel for the Methodists, and, as she lived at least a century before her time, she by that period anticipated the great movement for the rights of women by calling a meeting of the Wesleyan sisterhood of Bilston. It was a tea meeting, the first Methodist tea meeting held in Bilston. The invited were punctual. What woman could resist tea and a gossip? Bread and butter were there, and tea was there, and milk was not wanting; but sugar was. "Ah!" said Peggy, with a sigh, as they sat down to the table, "I am so sorry, I have not a bit of sugar, and no money to buy any; but there is some penny-an-ounce in the window, and you can all have a bit of that,"—putting a piece into their mouths and allowing the tea to absorb sweetness as it flowed through the saccharine matter. What speeches were made, what resolutions were come to, is not recorded, but we may be very certain that the question of ways and means was the most difficult at a tea meeting where there was no money to buy sugar. What Peggy, however, could not accomplish, another woman did. The conquering heroine was Miss Loxdale, an aunt of the present owner of that name, and the fortune attached to it. Riches had just begun to grow in the Loxdale family then, thanks to the mines of wealth opening up under their otherwise not very rich land. I am not quite certain, however, whether Miss Loxdale was the conquering or the conquered heroine; certainly she was a heroine, for

it required no little courage in a lady of even the smallest local position and wealth to turn Methodist and give a site for a chapel. Conquering or conquered, it happened in this wise:—Dr. Coke was then zealously founding the Wesleyan Foreign Missions, but there were those who thought that charity was much more needed nearer home, so that his zeal for those abroad was largely confined to himself, and he had to be his own missionary, and pay the expenses of the mission as well as he could. He would go about canvassing for subscriptions, go out and spend them, and then come home and canvass again. In one of his canvassing tours he came to Bilston. He does not appear to have gone to see Peggy, but he did go to Miss Loxdale, who gave the enterprising doctor herself, by becoming Mrs. Coke, and Peggy and her friends the wish of their hearts—a chapel. That chapel must have received the name of The Temple, for the street in which it reared its front was afterwards called Temple Street. I doubt, however, if the Wesleyans stood godfather to such a name, for in their first burst of gratitude it was known among them as Loxdale Chapel, in honour of the donor. But a lady is sometimes no more honoured in her own family than a prophet in his own country, and she was rather regarded by the Loxdales as having gone out of her mind when she went out of the Church with a mission-loving parson.

The front of the chapel raised by the Wesleyans on the site that Miss Loxdale gave them was not very pretentious, and the inside was in keeping with the scanty promise of the exterior. Even when extended at the back its dimensions did not exceed thirty-six feet by forty feet, and, with the gallery, would have had difficulty in accommodating anything like a large congregation. A portion, if not the whole, of the space under the gallery was divided from the main body of the building by a wooden partition, and was sacred to the stabling of the horses of the “round preachers,” as the Bilston folks were wont to call the travelling preachers

of the Wesleyan Methodists of that day. They were "travelling preachers" then, going the round of large circuits, from "society" to "society," holding their meetings in places wide apart. They needed horses and had them, and when the "round preacher" came round to Bilston he would put his horse into the strange private pew thus provided for him in the chapel, and the animal was apt to be annoyingly restless, from discontent with either the sermon or his manger.

By a deed, dated January 31st, 1801, we learn that the chapel and ground were conveyed for a term of 999 years, commencing April 1st, 1784, to certain trustees for securing the use of them for Wesleyan Methodists. A Sunday School was started in connection with the chapel, and grew to large and flourishing proportions. The Rules, printed on a large sheet of paper, and said to have been drawn up by Bilston's philanthropist and most remarkable of Christians, Etheridge, bear the date of that year. The first rule provides that the children should be taught reading and writing; the second, that they should attend at ten o'clock in the morning and two in the afternoon; the third, that children guilty of swearing, pilfering, fighting, quarrelling, or repeated absence or irregularity of attendance, if not reformed by reproof, should be dismissed; and rules four and five provide a fine of 6*d.* each time that a teacher or superintendent was absent. A very mildly written addendum sets forth the advantages of Sunday Schools, and explains that the teaching in that school would be voluntary. In St. Leonard's Church Sunday School it was not. That school was for many years held in the body of St. Leonard's Church, the male teachers being paid 1*s.* and the female teachers 8*d.* a day for their services. There lies before me a prospectus of sermons preached at St. Leonard's in 1817, in aid of its Sunday Schools, with annual balance sheet attached, showing that during the previous year £11 14*s.* had thus been paid to teachers and for school cleaning.

Books for instruction, and the payment of monitors in the evening schools, cost £5 12s. 3d.; singers, light, and music, £1 14s. 6d.; bill for singers' dinners, etc., £2 4s. 7d. (the dinner being given at Tonky's public-house, a little old-fashioned inn that was entered by descending steps). Bonnets for the girls, hats for the boys, and 236 yards of ribbon for both, cost £18 14s. 9d. This was for decorating the scholars for their march in the procession through the town on School Anniversary Sunday; but though the Methodists did not decorate, their procession was the more moving, for the teachers were there, and where men, and women, and maidens of position and means thus worked, the poorest felt they could not withhold their aid. The school anniversary sermons often brought £50 into the exchequer, parents flocking from miles around to the services as children flocked to the schools. The first Methodist school was opened by Mrs. Brooke, the wife of a tailor, who carried on business in High Street, and amassed in his business money enough to build the houses on the left-hand side of the road from Bilston to Willenhall, known as Bride's Row. She commenced the school in the large roomy kitchen of her house, and one of her first scholars was her only child, afterwards the Rev. James Brooke, who a few years ago died at the age of ninety years, after having been a travelling preacher in the Wesleyan Connexion for nearly seventy years.

By 1825, the Wesleyans, both in their school and chapel, had far outgrown the accommodation provided for them in Temple Street, and they purchased what had been a large farmhouse, then a "hall," and lastly a public-house and gardens, where the Wesleyan Chapel still stands at the junction of Oxford and Bridge Streets, very effectively dominating the former. There was a goodly quantity of land purchased with the mines under it to preserve the stability of the house, the land being converted into a burial ground, and other land adjoining being subsequently purchased for like protective

and funeral purposes. It was a large square-built house with a square portico, supported by four stone pillars. The Wesleyans simply gutted the house, pewed the body, and put up a gallery within, the pillars of which rest upon the coal measure. The old pillars supporting the portico are still there, but when the chapel was enlarged two more were added to their number, that the portico might bear some proportion to the increased size of the building. Where the stables and barnhouse stood, a large, substantial, and comfortable preacher's house has been erected. Schools were erected at the back, and they also have been considerably enlarged. I need scarcely add, too, that since the march of education commenced the management of the schools has been greatly improved. Discipline has been preserved since Mr. John Harper became a superintendent thirty years ago, without recourse to the cane. For some thirty years after the school began it was frequently and vigorously used. It is due, however, to the old worthies who used it to say that its exercise, like that of "the cat" in the army, was frequently preceded by something like a solemn court-martial, and an amusing picture has been painted to me of two urchins of whom it had been complained that they had on one Sunday, above all other days, cast stones at the doors of the Independent Chapel in Oxford Street. Clapsed tremblingly in each other's arms in a corner of the schoolroom, with tears in their eyes, they watched a conference of superintendents with canes in their hands. Smarting in anticipation from coming blows, they awaited the decision of the council. Their agony was protracted. There were many difficulties in the minds of the councillors. First, should the culprits be caned at all; secondly, should they be caned with their jackets on or off; and thirdly, who should cane them. At last a charitable brother suggested that instead of caning them they should pray over them. This was agreed to. The young urchins were called into the centre of the room and howled loudly



accordingly. They were ordered on to their knees, but just as they expected a heavy blow on their shoulders, to their even greater astonishment than satisfaction, the canes were laid aside, and their judges fell on their knees beside them, and prayed a prayer so unmercifully calling for mercy on the devoted heads of the mischievous lads that they resolved by any power that might be vouchsafed that they would never risk such a punishment again.

They were a stirring and enterprising people, those Methodists of Bilston, nearly sixty years ago. Long before gas was manufactured for the town, they manufactured it for their chapel, which they lighted up in a manner that filled the minds of some with amazement and others with dismay. More than one old lady and more than one old gentleman, too, wanted to know what they meant by bringing fire into the "House of God" in that way to endanger their lives by the perils of explosion; while hundreds came for miles around to witness the glowing triumph over tallow candles. Very cautiously the Methodists had gone to work. Two of the most trusted and tried of their number, two of those least likely to be caught by the snares of Satan, daringly went to Birmingham, and boldly penetrated into the pit of its theatre—without dreading the pit that hath no bottom—just to see how the gas burnt. They came back, and reported in glowing terms of the gleaming light. It is due to their memory to say that the gas was all they saw in that wicked place. They saw not the play. They knew not even its name. They heard a man cry, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse," and thought what a beggarly kingdom that must be which a man would give for a horse.

The gas-making, for which Mr. Baldwin, the local iron-master, gratuitously provided all the iron requisites, was, with chapel and burial ground, under the care of old Andrew Allen, who added to much eccentricity more deafness. He was housed on the ground, and, the better to enable him to preserve the graves from "the body-snatchers," he

was armed with a gun, and provided with powder and shot ; but he was warned never to fire his gun until he had three times repeated the challenging words, "Who's there?" Once, late at night, two stewards had need to go to Andrew Allen to instruct him in some preparation for the early morning. They knocked at the door ; Allen was in bed, but up went the window, and they had no sooner seen a nightcap than out came a gun, and a hasty voice cried, "Who's there?" In terror lest the cry should be repeated twice before they could answer, they shouted with a force calculated to break any drum that Allen might have left in his ear, "Don't fire, don't fire ; for God's sake, don't fire !" and, Andrew happily recognising the voices, all danger was over.

Until a very few years ago Bilston was but one society of a very large and wide circuit, and some of the local preachers, stewards, and leaders came long distances, on horse or in vehicle, to attend the quarterly meetings. This necessitated the holding of the meetings in the morning, to secure timely return at night, and the provision of dinner as well as tea. Dinner was the weightier meal, as the quarterly accounts show. Here are some items of a quarter-day in 1834 :—29½lbs. of beef, 14s. 9d.; 10½lbs. of mutton, 5s. 8d.; 4 gals. of ale, 6s.; 1 peck of turnips and 3 pecks of potatoes, 1s. 10d.; ¼lb. of tobacco, 11d.; pipes, 4d.; 2lbs. of sugar, 1s. 9d.; 2lbs. of butter, 3s.; tea, 2s.; bread, 2s. 4d. At another quarterly meeting the cost of ale was 7s. 6d.; and there were 3 dozen pipes to a ¼lb. of tobacco, so that, unless some brought their own tobacco, though there were many smoking there was not much smoked.

All that has passed away ; the Bilston Circuit is little better now than a small ring fence, within which a short walk will take the representative to his quarterly meeting. Yet what a growth of Christianity Wesleyanism boasts within that fence, and how Peggy, could she revisit the locality of her first Wesleyan tea meeting, would wonder at the many chapels which have grown around !

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